

Lessons Learned

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Lessons Learned

by [Sif \(Rosae\)](#)

Summary

Rather than the police station, Katsuki's friends bring him to a hospital after rescuing him from the villains. His wounds were minor, but it didn't make having them treated any less important. As it would so happen, Best Jeanist was also brought to this hospital after the attack.

Sometimes, small choices have a big impact on how a story plays out.

Aka: Best Jeanist Acquires A Son. Featuring: Serious talks regarding abuse and emotional scars, one adult finally stepping the hell up and trying to help Katsuki, me going off about the sports festival because I'm still not over it, pro-heros having a group chat, and Katsuki finally getting a chance to learn how to be good.

Notes

So, I'm back on my self-indulgent train with Lesson's Learned! This was written because I

didn't feel like canon really utilized Best Jeanist like it could have as a positive influence on Katsuki, and I'm frustrated by how his trauma, mental health issues, and home life haven't been seriously addressed in canon (yet). As a disclaimer, I don't actually think Mitsuki is as bad as I present her in this fic, but she's definitely abusive and almost certainly the root of a lot of Katsuki's problems. There's been some hints in canon that this will be taken more seriously/addressed, and I really hope it is. For now though, I'm going to deal by writing this monster of a fic. Since Kit Kats apparently didn't get it out of my system.

General Note: I fudge a lot of little canon things like timelines/locations/unimportant specifics. Mostly because this is fanfiction and I'm too lazy to hunt down every detail. So like, if something's a bit off just roll with it. Also we're going with the manga for most of this.

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Frustration Personified

Chapter Notes

I have about 30k of this fic written so far (no idea how long it'll be by the end lol), but I'm still working on editing a good chunk of it. So expect updates to be oddly spaced for awhile.

Tsunagu Hakamata was frustrated beyond belief.

From what UA's teachers had told him, this was a normal response for anyone foolish enough to engage with Katsuki Bakugou.

On a rational level, he knew that he couldn't reform every hero-in-training that came through his office. It wasn't like he hadn't failed before. To the contrary, he'd had a few interns in the past that ended up turning into villains. When you decided to take on the worst of the bunch, you had to accept you wouldn't always succeed. But in each case prior, Tsunagu had known from the moment they had walked through his door if he'd be able to turn them around or not. He had understood them, been able to see if they really had the core of the hero or not. Of course, he'd always still made his best efforts. Never let it be said he didn't try to save all of them. However, he didn't let himself be frustrated with lost causes. Instead he gave it his all and let them choose their own fate after that. You couldn't make someone walk on the right path, only offer them guidance.

Katsuki Bakugou was different. He'd been different since the moment Tsunagu had seen him chained to a podium at the U.A. Sports Festival. He'd been different since Tsunagu had reviewed extremely carefully written reports from Katsuki's teachers, and he'd been different since the moment he'd walked through Tsunagu's doors. Because regardless of what Tsunagu may have hinted at to the boy, Katsuki Bakugou was never going to be a villain. Even with a jagged exterior, foul mouth, and violent nature, the boy had a bright core to him that shown through everything else.

Tsunagu had been hopeful. He'd seen the talent the boy had, a hard work ethic and a determination unlike most others. Katsuki's only issue was his behavior, he had the heart of a hero but carried himself like a villain.

It was tearing him apart because every day had felt like he was getting close to breaking through that tough shell. Like if he just waited a little longer or pushed a little more, he'd hit that breakthrough that Katsuki desperately needed. But something pushed him back every time. And that something was the core of his frustrations. It frustrated him because he didn't understand it,

couldn't identify the root of the problem. Pride, anger, hatred even, he could deal with and had slowly been working through, but there was still something in the way.

Never before had Tsunagu so thoroughly understood the frustration of being so close to something and yet so far from it. He wanted to lie to himself and say it was just an issue of time. However, Best Jeanist did not believe in excuses. It was not a matter of time. Even if he were given years to work with Katsuki Bakugou, nothing would've changed. Not without finding that wall that he couldn't understand.

Somehow, the boy being kidnapped only worsened his frustration. Now Tsunagu was well aware his emotions were unfair, irrational, and never something he'd admit to out loud, but the boy's absolute determination to become a hero had only increased his feeling of failure. On a very selfish level, he would've almost prefer it if Katsuki had decided to become a villain. Like that would somehow make him it better if it had been a hopeless task the entire time. Those feelings were crushed and pushed deep down inside of his chest. It was selfish and cruel to be upset with the boy for making the correct choice. If anything, it just meant that if someone did finally get through to Katsuki, the hero he'd become would be all the grander for it.

But damn it, Tsunagu had been so sure that he could've been that someone. Yet he'd failed, and a very quiet part of him was blaming himself for the fact the villains had targeted the boy at all. Maybe if he'd pushed a little harder, or been a bit more insightful, maybe if he'd been reformed, they wouldn't have been interested. As much as Tsunagu tried to pull his thoughts away from possible futures, they kept tempting him back. Taunting him.

It didn't help that he was currently laying in a hospital bed ten feet away from Katsuki.

Tsunagu's chest injury from the fight with All for One was already healed. It had been bad, but the healer on staff had been able to take care of it. Now he was merely resting. Katsuki was asleep, his own injuries also patched up. It was strange, the difference between the explosive hero-in-training who had been under his care and the child sleeping on a bed only a few feet away. Sure, Katsuki had always been childish, bratty, and quick to anger, but he had never really felt like a child. Not when he'd been yelling at children on his patrol, arguing back loudly, or fussing over his hair. Not when he'd been on TV and fighting other children in an arena, or chained to a podium afterwards. Not when he'd been captured and refused to even fake becoming a villain, choosing to fight even when desperately outnumbered and outmatched rather than forsake his morals.

Yet here he was, having fought his way out of hell, curled up on his side looking for all the world like any other teenager. The sight plucked at Tsunagu's strings, pulling him towards that *something*. Still though, he couldn't make it out no matter how hard he searched. A few hours passed during which Tsunagu was left to these thoughts. Sleep would not come to him no matter how many breathing exercises he did.

Eventually, Katsuki awoke with a start. The immediate change, how his form tensed, eyes flashed open, as if expecting an enemy in front of him almost pained Tsunagu to watch. He wanted to stride across the room and wrap the boy up in a hug. Tell him that everything was alright, that they wouldn't be able to take him again. Had it been any other of Tsunagu's interns, he would've done it in a heartbeat. But he knew it would only put Katsuki on the defensive, so he remained still and allowed him to get his bearings.

While Katsuki put himself back together, a nurse bustled in. Both of them had their vitals checked in rapid succession. Tsunagu was cleared to leave, and he almost did so. Standing up to stretch with every intent of offering Katsuki a few kind words and then heading home to reflect. But then the nurse had turned to talk to Katsuki quietly. It wasn't as if he'd meant to overhear, but he had always been a bit too good at listening.

Physically, Katsuki was healed and allowed to leave. However the hospital was under strict orders not to release him unless his parents were able to come get him or one of his teachers was able to escort him home since he was underage. His parents had been contacted but were too busy to make the drive up to the hospital, so he'd need to spend the night. One of his teachers would probably be free to escort him in the morning.

Maybe it was how Katsuki had tensed at the prospect of spending the night in the hospital. Or maybe it was how Katsuki had merely nodded, as if unsurprised that his parents had more important things to do after their son had been kidnapped. Tsunagu couldn't pinpoint exactly what it was that made him act, but he knew damn well he wasn't leaving this child alone in a hospital. So he'd intervened.

"Nurse Kita, correct? If he's healed and ready to return, I would be more than happy to escort Katsuki back to his household. I am not staff at U.A. but I'm sure the school wouldn't mind if I stood in for one of them."

The wide-eyed look that Katsuki fixed him with hurt Tsunagu more than All for One's air cannon had. As if the boy were absolutely blown away by the idea that someone would help him when they weren't required too. Surprise narrowed to suspicion after no more than a heartbeat, but Katsuki kept his mouth shut. Most likely unsure of Tsunagu's intentions but wanting out of the hospital badly enough to play along.

It took a game of telephone involving Tsunagu personally calling Principal Nezu to assure him that he was well enough to see to the boy's safety, but within the hour Katsuki had been signed out into his care for the evening and the two of them were sitting in the back of a car as it rumbled to life. Throughout the entire affair, Katsuki had been uncharacteristically quiet. To be fair, he'd also almost fallen asleep more than once. Now that they were settled into their seats, Tsunagu could

already see red eyes drooping and his posture leaning every so slightly. Despite his clear exhaustion, Katsuki stayed awake for the first five minutes of their drive. His gaze was accusing and even without looking at him, Tsunagu could feel the questions radiating off of him.

Five minutes was all Tsunagu could stand before he broke the silence.

“While I know you may not care for my opinion, I would be remiss if I didn’t tell you that you were incredibly brave. Many of the experienced pro-heroes I know wouldn’t have dared try to fight against so many villains at once and you didn’t even hesitate. When we first met I had my reservations about you, but clearly you have a much stronger moral code than I gave you credit for.”

The snort and eye-roll were expected, but Katsuki didn’t try to refute the point. Instead he just turned his gaze out the window. Contemplating. It was a few long minutes before the other finally spoke.

“I would’ve been fine to just stay in the hospital for a night. You didn’t have to go out of your way like this and waste your time just because you felt bad or some dumb shit like that.”

Up went the walls again. Even after being kidnapped he was already trying to push others away. It invoked frustration and pity in Tsunagu in equal measure. Still, Tsunagu knew better than to offer kind reassurances. He’d learned quickly that they would be taken as an insult.

“My assigned task was to help return you home safely according to Detective Naomasa. As you should well know a true hero doesn’t leave their job half-finished.”

Katsuki still seemed suspicious, but he accepted the answer at face value. As long as Tsunagu had selfish motivations he was willing to put his pride aside. His glare softened a little as his gaze grew unfocused. Tsunagu tried to ignore the pain in his chest. The two of them were only a seat apart, but it felt like there was a chasm splitting the car in two. It should’ve been easy for him to cross, to mend. Stitching things back together was a passion of his, he was known for it among the other pros. Yet here he sat, unable to even find the hole let alone a needle and thread.

So he stayed silent and watched as Katsuki fell asleep. It wasn’t quite the same sleep as before, even in his rest there was a tension to his shoulders and a furrow to his brow. As if he were expecting an attack.

After what he'd just lived through, it wasn't unreasonable.

Tsunagu turned his gaze out the window. There wasn't anything left for him to do. He'd return Katsuki home, let the boy know he could contact him if anything came up knowing damn well that he never would, and that would be that. Anything else was up to his teachers and parents.

Why then, did he still feel pulled towards the boy sleeping against the other window? Why was Katsuki any different than any of the others he'd failed in the past?

Even as he questioned his emotions, he knew the answer he didn't want to acknowledge. It was because, as Katsuki had proved tonight, Tsunagu hadn't failed him *yet*. He hadn't saved him, but Katsuki Bakugou both didn't need saving and needed it more desperately than anyone Tsunagu had met before. Katsuki Bakugou would never be a villain, he was going to be a hero and there wasn't a force on earth that could or would stop him. Unlike the others before him, that had never been the issue Tsunagu needed to tackle. No, the issue with Katsuki Bakugou was whether or not he would ever be happy. Whether it would ever be enough for him. Whether he'd learn to let others in and make real bonds.

It wouldn't stop him from becoming a hero, but it ate at Tsunagu to know that he couldn't even start to address how deep rooted the problem was. That he had finally met something beyond his abilities and he was going to just give up and walk away rather than try to push through.

Because god, Tsunagu *hated* leaving a job half-done.

Homecoming

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tires growled against the pavement. They had arrived. Looks like he was going to have to live with it. Katsuki woke up the moment the car stopped, taking a moment or two to contain his flight or fight response. Since his gaze was already out the window, Tsunagu politely pretended not to see.

He'd half expected Katsuki to race from the car the moment they arrived, but when the boy hesitated for a heartbeat, Tsunagu made a quick choice. Opening his own car door in a smooth movement, he stepped out into the fresh air of the night and made his way around the car. By the time he'd circled around Katsuki had exited his own side and fixed Tsunagu with a hard look. Against expectations, Katsuki made no comment about his presence and instead dropped his eyes after a long second and strode towards the door.

Only then did Tsunagu notice how dark it was outside. It was the dead of night after all, and this row of houses had few streetlights. Ah. Well nothing to be done about it now. Instead he just followed Katsuki in silence. The lights were still on in the house but Katsuki pulled a key from his pocket regardless.

Something felt off, Katsuki was being *quiet* for once in his life. Not silent, the boy (despite what a few others would say) was capable of being silent. Stealth wasn't his strong suit but he could do it. He also possessed the astounding ability to fume louder than anyone Tsunagu had met before without saying a word. The boy's very presence was loud no matter how much noise he was making. Not here though. Here Katsuki seemed to have shrunk down, his footsteps light and movements muffled.

Tsunagu's concern grew as the boy silently slid the key into the lock and opened the door all with that same quiet, almost cautious manner.

It didn't prepare him for what came next.

"YOU LITTLE SHIT!" Echoed out of the doorway before it had even fully opened. Before Tsunagu could move Katsuki was being yanked into the house by his hair and the yelling that ensued was deafening. After a moment of shock, Tsunagu made out the picture in front of him. A tall blonde woman who looked an awful lot like Katsuki had pulled the boy into the house. It had been a handful of seconds at most and she had already smacked him upside the head twice. Tears were pricking at her eyes, but her face was contorted in rage.

Katsuki Bakugou hadn't cowered when facing the League of Villains. Not when the odds were

well past impossible and certainly not when facing his own death. Yet in the hallway of his house, his mother in front of him and a wall behind him, that was exactly what he was doing. The boy's own face was twisted up between rage and fear. His teeth were grit tightly together and while he was doing everything he could to not break, cracks were spiraling through his facade. Anytime Katsuki tried to speak to his own defense, her words only got louder.

It all suddenly made a terrifying amount of sense.

Fuck. How had he not even considered this before?

Some far away part of Tsunagu was processing the awful words that were being said. An angry, over the top lecture about putting people at risk and wasting heroes' time. Most of him was just seeing red. Her hand was raised again and Tsunagu found himself unfrozen. Threads shot from his wrist and caught the hand before it could connect, reminding both occupants of the room that he was still there. Now both of them had frozen, eyes on him. Katsuki's face was a mixture of absolute shock and blooming horror. Again, unable to believe someone would try to help him. His mother's face was mostly shock with rage boiling just underneath.

Alright. Diffuse the situation.

Tsunagu allowed his threads to pull away from her hand as he stepped forward into the house. Both hands were raised in a placating manner and he kept his tone as even and as calm as he could. Katsuki didn't need any more yelling or violence right now. He had to remember that.

"Mrs. Bakugou, Katsuki has just been through a highly stressful experience and while I understand you were probably very worried about him, hitting him is not an appropriate reaction."

Her eyes narrowed in on him, and Tsunagu didn't miss the way that Katsuki gave the tiniest shake of his head, his eyes pleading for his former mentor not to get involved even as his back pressed against the wall just a little more. Tsunagu's very soul ached for the boy in front of him.

"And who the fuck are you? What the fuck do you think you know about what's appropriate for me or my fucking kid?"

That'd explain where Katsuki picked up the cursing. Not really his main focus right now though. Again, he tried to lighten the situation, giving a quick bow as he introduced himself.

“I’m known as Best Jeanist, current No. 4 Pro-Hero. Katsuki was an intern of mine not that long ago, and I was a part of the rescue mission sent to retrieve him.”

Surprisingly, her mood actually seemed to lighten at that. For a moment, Tsunagu had hope that maybe the situation wasn’t unsalvageable. Then she spoke again, her mood changing as she appeared to dismiss him.

“Oh fucking christ, I remember that internship shit. No wonder you couldn’t keep control of him if you think hitting him is out of the question. I raised this fucker myself, he’s a violent prideful asshole with a god complex who got spoiled too much when he was younger. He doesn’t learn any other way. Maybe if you lot teaching him had figured that out then he wouldn’t be weak enough to get himself kidnapped before he’s even got a fucking provisional licence.”

Now, Tsunagu had a whole lot of thoughts on that. He prided himself on not cursing regardless of how bad the situation was, but god tonight he was going to break his perfect streak. Or he would’ve, if he hadn’t chanced a glance at Katsuki and seen that the boy wasn’t watching them anymore. Crimson eyes were firmly fixed on the ground, hands clenched into trembling fists by his side, tears were at the corner of his eyes, only barely held back. Everything about Katsuki screamed shame, embarrassment, fear.

The only thing worse than hearing Katsuki’s mother say such awful things about her son was the realization that Katsuki believed them.

Tsunagu felt his heart break at the very same moment his determination to save this kid grew from a torch to a raging bonfire. He didn’t even think, all he knew was that he wasn’t leaving Katsuki here. As much as he wanted to verbally tear every incorrect part of that statement to shreds, none of his words would reach Katsuki as long as his mother was here.

“I wish I had the time to refute every part of that statement, but unfortunately we currently are on a bit of a time-crunch. As I’m sure Katsuki was trying to inform you earlier, there’s been a change in plans.”

Now Katsuki’s eyes were back on him, wide eyed and confused. Luckily his mother was too focused on Tsunagu to notice. She seemed ready to start yelling again, but Tsunagu steamrolled over her.

“There’s been a few reports indicating that the villains may make a second attempt tonight as several of them were able to regroup. It’s pure speculation currently, but for safety’s sake I will be accompanying Katsuki to a confidential location for the evening, possibly longer. He’s just here to

reassure you and your husband that he's safe and collect some of his things. Speaking of which, Katsuki, why don't you go do that now?"

It was an easy exit, and after a moment more of wide-eyed staring, Katsuki decided to take it. His voice was uncharacteristically small but didn't waiver.

"Yeah, sorry. I'll just need a few minutes to grab clothing and shit."

Before his mother could react, he slipped back into the house. That left just the two adults there. Tsunagu could see that she was fuming, but what was she going to do? Accuse a top pro-hero of lying? Her face twisted up with rage.

"Any reason that none of you fuckers felt the need to tell me about this change of plans before now? Shouldn't I have some fucking say on what happens to my own damn son?"

Easy enough to refute. Tsunagu didn't like lying but that didn't mean he couldn't.

"The decision was only made a few minutes ago, and we felt it was best to inform you in person. Usually we would consult with the guardians of any child before we made modifications to their arrangement, however this is a high profile case with too much risk involved for us to delay. We do our best to accommodate, but Katsuki's safety must come first, as I'm sure you understand."

The sneer deepened, her eyes near slits but Tsunagu could tell he'd won. For now at least. With a huff, she turned away from him to stomp off into the main house.

"Fine, if you lot want to put up with him be my fucking guest. I'm sure you'll be calling me back in fifteen minutes once he's worn you out with his shit."

Tsunagu's iron control was the only thing that kept him from snapping back at her, and even then it was a damn close thing. Left alone in the entryway, it was only a moment or two more before Katsuki returned. The boy looked unsure, but he had his backpack slung over his shoulder nonetheless. Behind him followed a man with short brown hair. Presumable Katsuki's father. Katsuki seemed to be doing his best to ignore the man as he went to put back on his shoes. With how soft spoken the man was, it didn't wasn't a hard task. For a moment, Tsunagu was hopeful that at least one of Katsuki's parents wasn't entirely awful, and then he actually heard what the other was saying.

“I know we’ve had this conversation before, but you need to stop antagonizing her Katsuki. She doesn’t want to embarrass you in front of your mentor, but you don’t leave her with any other choice. You could make this so much easier on all of us if you’d just behave. We’re only trying to help.”

It was said in a soft, placating tone. Like it was just any other scolding and not blaming a child for things out of their control. Another piece of the puzzle fell into place. Inability to take criticism. Negative reactions to kind tones. A constant assumption that others were trying to manipulate him when they offered help or advice.

Clearing his throat before the man could continue, Tsunagu took in Katsuki. Everything about the boy screamed that he might fall apart at any moment. That he might shatter into pieces that couldn’t be put back together. Katsuki looked up at him, eyes openly fearful now. It was time to leave.

“If you have everything Katsuki, we really need to head out now.”

He did not address the soft-spoken man behind Katsuki, but it seems that he didn’t take the hint. Before Katsuki could protest, the man pulled him into a quick hug. It seemed almost sweet until he pulled back, moving to touch the quickly reddening mark on his son’s cheek and looking away with a disappointed sigh.

Katsuki pushed him away as he turned to stride out the door. Without looking back at that awful household, Tsunagu followed him.

The click the door made behind him was one of the most satisfying sounds Tsunagu had heard in his life.

Chapter End Notes

Mitsuki: My son is violent and hitting him is a good idea to solve this and definitely not teaching him violence is an appropriate reaction to frustration.

Tsunagu, shoving Katsuki into his pocket: I’m sorry but someone just called and I have to go right now immediately.

Big Kids Do Cry

Chapter Notes

I'm going to fudge locations here a bit, so ignore any weirdness there. Also thank you everyone for the super sweet comments! Yes, there really isn't enough Dad Jeanist content out there But I'm Going To Change That.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Katsuki turned to look at him for directions, Tsunagu only gestured to the car. Moving back around it so he could enter on his side. Clearly Katsuki didn't buy his story about the change in plans, but he seemed willing enough to go along with it anyways. Their driver took one look at the two of them and asked no questions. Only raised the privacy divider between the front and back seats. Tsunagu would need to thank him personally later.

For right now, a heavy silence hung between him and Katsuki. The other was pressed to the wall of the car door. Unwilling to make a move until he understood the game. Something between fearful and angry. Usually, Tsunagu would try to be delicate in a case like this. Not that he'd had this situation happen often, but all heroes received training on how to handle victims of abuse. None of that advice was for a situation quite like this. So he went the direct route.

“Have you talked to any of your teachers about your home life?”

A snort. Katsuki's grimace spoke volumes on its own. Still, even after all he'd witnessed he wasn't prepared for the boy's response.

“Of course not. I know better than to give them any fucking ideas.”

All the self-control in the world couldn't have stopped the astonished and horrified look that Tsunagu gave Katsuki.

The boy actually believed that his teachers would take inspiration from his mother rather than help him. That they would think her treatment was *justified*. No fucking wonder he had never let his guard down around Tsunagu or any of his other teachers. Was that how he'd been living? Assuming that if he let anyone think for a second that he wouldn't fight back they'd leap on the opportunity to hurt him? Assuming that was how he was supposed to act towards others?

The longer Tsunagu went without replying, the more worked up Katsuki got, clearly about to start yelling. Without thinking, Tsunagu reached a hand towards him, wanting to wrap him up in a hug. Katsuki slammed himself back against the side of the car, instinctively jerking away. His rage instantly flipped to fear. It lasted only a heartbeat before Katsuki realized what he'd done, switching to snarling and spitting angry words but Tsunagu couldn't hear them. All he could see was that absolute terror that had engulfed the boy for a moment. That had been directed at him. Because Katsuki thought Tsunagu would hit him.

For a moment, Tsunagu thought he might be sick. Instead a determination clawed its way into his heart and Tsunagu started to move again. Slowly, steady. This time when Katsuki flinched, clamping up in fear, he didn't stop. It was almost physically painful to do, but he wasn't sure anything else would work. He wasn't sure this would work, but that same *something* that had been tugging at him for weeks now pulled him forward.

Katsuki stayed frozen like a deer in headlights as Tsunagu slowly and carefully pulled the boy into a hug. Ever so gently he lead the boy forward until Katsuki was pressed up against his side and wrapped up in his arms. He held him tightly, trying to keep the rest of world out. Trying to shield this child from things he was too young to have lived through. Trying to offer a moment of safety.

Something in Katsuki broke, one of the jagged edges that he used so carefully to keep other out fell away and it felt like it was taking him with it. There was a visible struggle, as the boy tried to pull his anger back to himself. But his tears came anyways, having broken through the dam at long last.

Tsunagu didn't speak. He just hugged Katsuki close, rubbing his back in soft circles and humming softly. There were a lot of tears saved up from over the years, best to start getting them out now.

Eventually the physical and emotional exhaustion of the day caught up with Katsuki. His sobs turned to quiet tears and his eyes drooped. Five or so minutes passed and he was out like a light. Carefully Tsunagu retrieved a handkerchief and cleaned his face up. Then he adjusted the two of them so Katsuki was still carefully tucked under his arm and could rest comfortably against his side, but he was able to access his phone.

By the time that was done, it was Tsunagu's hands that were close to shaking, fury burning in his core. He couldn't think straight, but he knew damn well that he needed to get started doing something about this now. Exactly what he needed to do he wasn't sure, so out of habit he clicked into the chat used by most of the experienced pro-heros in the area. At least, all of them that weren't dicks. Plus Detective Naomasa since All-Might had added him and none of them had the heart to kick him out.

Snipe: Kill their parents and tell the kid that they were actually monsters sent to pretend to be their parents.

Midnight: Candy or ice cream will get most kids on your side, just make sure you let them pick the flavor.

Thirteen: Maintaining a polite and calm demeanor will encourage the child to trust you.

Naomasa: ... Kidnappings are usually committed by family members or someone close to the child so if you're going to frame someone, I'd recommend using that.

Gang Orca: Just claim they're your kid, fake DNA test results, and absolutely deny what anyone says to the contrary.

Ectoplasm: Not announcing your intentions in a group chat full of pro-heroes is also probably helpful.

Best Jeanist: wait, no, i mean like, how do i do kidnap a child legally

Hawks: Anything's legal if you don't get caught.

Naomasa: Adoption or protective custody?

Naomasa: I can send you relevant guidelines and forms if that would be helpful.

Best Jeanist: thank you naomasa, that would be very helpful.

Eraserhead: so were just going to ignore the fact that all of us were ready to assist with a crime no questions asked?

Midnight: You say that as if you weren't just as willing.

Gang Orca: Listen, normally I'm firmly against illegal activity but if it's bad enough that it got Best Jeanist cursing then I don't need to ask any questions beyond "do you need me to come help?"

Gang Orca: I've never seen him this pissed before so I'm going with whatever he says.

Snipe: Yeah the lack of proper punctuation and capitalization is enough to convince me on it's own.

Eraserhead: fair enough

Eraserhead: wait @Best Jeanist weren't you escorting bakugou to his home?

Best Jeanist: i was doing that at one point, yes.

Best Jeanist: i am now no longer doing that.

Hawks: Didn't he already get kidnapped once today??

Eraserhead: what the hell happened? did you get intercepted? do you need assistance?

Best Jeanist: it's fine now.

Best Jeanist: in completely unrelated news i've acquired a son :)

Eraserhead: tsunagu you can't just take a child and claim them as yours

Midnight: He would know, he's tried.

Best Jeanist: [katsuki-sleeping.png]

Best Jeanist: i'm sorry i can't hear you over the sound of my new son sleeping :) :)

Gang Orca: Honestly I'm just surprised it took this long.

Present Mic: Sorry, only just now tuning in, what happened to Katsuki? Is that swelling on his

cheek? I thought he was all healed up after the fight?

Best Jeanist: he was

Best Jeanist: that was courtesy of his mother

Best Jeanist: he wasn't even though the fucking door before she was on him. he was scared of her too.

Best Jeanist: this kid faced down eight high level villains without hesitation or fear and he was shaking like a leaf while she was screaming at him and blaming him for getting caught.

Best Jeanist: she tried to hit him again and i interfered and he looked like i'd just grown a second head. like the idea that someone would step in and protect him was unthinkable.

Best Jeanist: then when i try to calm things down, she tried to get me on board with hitting him and putting him down. that it was the only way to control him or some shit like that.

Best Jeanist: he thought that i was going to.

Best Jeanist: he thought that i was just going to hop on board and start hitting him too now that his mom had presented it as an option.

Naomasa: I'll get a case file started.

Naomasa: As of right now we'll consider him in protective custody.

Eraserhead: I'm contacting a social worker I know now. She's had experience working with aspiring heroes.

Eraserhead: I would also like to speak with him sooner rather than later.

Eraserhead: In any case, dorms are currently under construction and all students will be moved into them for their safety. Even if getting full custody is a challenge we can at least get him out of that house within the next two or three days.

Present Mic: Shouta, it may be worth speaking to the Midoriyas for statements as well.

Present Mic: It wasn't enough for me to do much more then keep my eye on it, but I've overheard Izuku ask Katsuki if he'd gotten into a fight with his mom again once or twice. As far as I've been able to tell, the two of them grow up together, so he might know something.

Eraserhead: Noted. I'll wait until we can talk to Katsuki first though, his pride is a delicate thing and Izuku has always been a sore spot.

Gang Orca: Tsunagu, are you holding up okay?

Best Jeanist: i'm getting there. taking deep breaths and reminding myself that going back there to pick a fight with her wouldn't solve anything even if it would be incredibly satisfying.

Best Jeanist: it's just

Best Jeanist: i'm frustrated with myself for not picking up on the clues sooner.

Best Jeanist: i'm frustrated that he just got kidnapped and is at a point in his life where he need familiarity, stability and comfort and instead he got this.

Best Jeanist: it's worth mentioning that his father was gas lighting him too. blaming him for being aggressive and somehow picking a fight when he didn't do anything.

Best Jeanist: he didn't even see her before she was on him and somehow he was still being blamed for it.

Snipe: Damn, no wonder the kid's got problems.

Hawks: I'll just throw it out there that I know a few people who know a few vigilantes

Hawks: None of whom need much more than getting pointed in the right direction

Best Jeanist: don't tempt me.

Eraserhead: As nice as it would be, it's the last thing Katsuki needs right now.

Eraserhead: He'd blame himself for anything that happened to either of them.

Thirteen: Agreed. Right now the best thing for him is kindness, patience and reassurance.

Thirteen: Given his nature, it's likely he'll resist any kind of help. It's unfortunately common among victims of abuse.

Thirteen: If possible, give him as much control over the situation as you can. There are some things you obviously cannot allow him to do, such as return to his home or harm himself/others, but any choice you can give him will help him feel more secure.

Thirteen: Even something small like allowing him to choose what he'd like to wear, where he wants to speak to someone, or what food he wants to eat will help.

Best Jeanist: Noted.

Best Jeanist: Alright, I'm getting into a better headspace. We're getting close to my place. I'm probably going to get him settled and head to bed myself.

Best Jeanist: @Eraserhead, if Nezu gets a call from his parents, my cover story was there was secondary activity from the villains and Katsuki was being moved to a confidential location for his safety.

Eraserhead: I'll pass it along.

Present Mic: I would also recommend leaving a note for when he wakes up. Katsuki's an early bird and from what I've overheard about his morning routine he doesn't like to sit still for long.

Best Jeanist: Also noted. Thank you all. I'll update everyone in the morning.

With that, Tsunagu closed down the messenger program and turned his phone off. He took a moment to just breathe, closing his eyes and focusing on the positives of the situation. Katsuki was safe now. His breathing was soft and slow, face relaxed fully now. With any luck, he wouldn't be returning to that home again. They might not even need to take the issue to court. Tsunagu being a well-respected pro-hero meant his testimony would carry a lot of weight. Since Katsuki had been very carefully healed at the hospital, as long as the bruise was properly documented in the morning there'd be no doubt where it came from. The driver could attest to Katsuki's state after exiting the house and prior to it. There was every chance his parents would just agree to sign over custody without a fight given the overwhelming evidence.

Everything was going to be alright. He was going to make sure of it.

The car slowly rumbled to a stop, the landscape outside was familiar and soothing. This time Katsuki didn't awaken, still curled firmly into Tsunagu's side. Glancing down at the boy, it seemed he had shifted in his sleep, his legs now tucked up on the seat and his hands gently holding onto Tsunagu's jacket.

Tsunagu didn't have the heart to wake him up. Instead he quietly opened the car door and used a mixture of his arm that was still wrapped around Katsuki firmly and his quirk to move the boy without jostling him awake. It was easier once they were outside the car. Katsuki slept on cradled in his arms as he made his way into his apartment building. Nobody else was awake at this hour, and his quirk came in handy for using his keycard on the elevator without needing his hands. The same trick worked for unlocking his actual apartment, and sliding the door shut behind him.

Relief overtook Tsunagu as he stepped into his home. His place was spacious, well-maintained,

and it radiated safety. Though now that he was actually in his home he was left with a choice. While Tsunagu did have a guest room, two in fact, he also had a rather comfortable couch in his own room and he was somewhat uncomfortable with the idea of leaving Katsuki alone for the night. It took almost a full minute of contemplation before he finally made up his mind.

The idea of having Katsuki in his sight was appealing, but the boy would probably want space to himself in the morning. Thirteen had stressed control and since Katsuki would probably wake up before him, giving him a space of his own and time to come to terms with what had happened would help with that.

Getting Katsuki into the spare bedroom closer to Tsunagu's only took a minute. It wasn't until Tsunagu tried to put the boy down that he encountered a problem. The teenager's hands were still clutching tightly onto the side of his jacket.

Granted, he could have simply used his quirk to free the jacket from the boy's grip, but that felt wrong. Sure, it was his jacket, but taking away anything that comforted Katsuki was beyond Tsunagu right now. Instead he ended up using his quirk to slip out of the fabric entirely, watching fondly for just a moment or two as Katsuki instinctively pulled the now limp jacket towards himself and curled into it. He pulled the blankets gently over the sleeping teenager, before slipping out of the room to grab a pen and paper. It only took him a moment to decide on what to say.

Katsuki,

You are currently in my apartment, I am down one door on the left if you exit the room. The door in front of the bed leads to the hallways, the one on your right leads to a bathroom. There should be towels in there if you would like to shower. There is also spare clothing in the dresser if you need it. Feel free to help yourself to anything in the kitchen. Your teachers are aware of where you are and indicated you were an early riser, but please don't hesitate to wake me if you need anything.

Tsunagu Hakamata

Everything else could be discussed in the morning. Once he had placed the note on the bedside table along with the boy's backpack, Tsunagu turned off the lights and slipped out of the room. Then he paused, thinking over the events of the day. It took him a second to remember where he had left it, but only a minute or so to retrieve a nightlight he'd been given as a gift quite a while ago. Well, more like a villain had been attempting to taunt him with it by accusing him of being afraid of the dark. Because the villain's quirk revolved around catching others in darkness and Tsunagu had been smart enough to avoid it. Out of pettiness he had kept the nightlight and pretended to be flattered (after he'd passed it through his support team to ensure it wasn't a trap of some kind). Now though, it seems it could come in handy after all. He quietly slipped back into the

room and plugged it into the outlet closest to the bed. Then he slipped back out again as the soft glow illuminated the room behind him. Time to get to his own bed.

Now that his job was done, he felt the toll the day had taken on him catching up. He barely had the presence of mind to pull the blankets over himself before his eyes were closing and he was out like a light.

Chapter End Notes

Hawks is that one friend that jokes about being down to kill someone but also would probably actually do it.

Being Brave

Chapter Notes

Recommended Listening

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Morning sunlight greeted Tsunagu when he opened his eyes again. Languidly he blinked and slowly started to stretch out his limbs. For a heartbeat he wondered why he was so sore. Then yesterday's events hit him like a car speeding through a building. The fight with All for One. The hospital room. Katsuki. A quick glance at the clock said it was 15 til 10, which, while not unreasonable given that he'd fallen asleep close to 3 am the night before, was still late. Pricking his ears he could faintly hear movement on the other side of the apartment. So Katsuki was still here. Good, that was good. Snagging his phone out of his pant's pocket, he glanced at his waiting messages. A good chunk were well-wishes, plus smaller matters of paperwork or awards, things that he could put off for the moment. Two threads caught his eye before he could close his phone though. The first from Eraserhead, the second from Detective Naomasa

Eraserhead: I've spoken to Nezu and Naomasa, as well the social worker, and given the circumstances it's been agreed that pushing for full removal of custody will be best. I've gone ahead and started to gather any evidence I could get from other teachers and pulled his medical records which have a few incidents that I'm now suspicious of, but it's all pretty circumstantial.

Eraserhead: Katsuki was a lot better at hiding things than I gave him credit for.

Eraserhead: Let me know how it goes once you're able to talk to him. His testimony would be the strongest evidence we could get, but I know it might be tough to convince him to speak up. The next best thing is going to be your own statement under a truth quirk, along with documentation of his injury.

After shooting off a quick confirmation he switched over to the messages from Detective Naomasa. It appeared the other had sent him a number of documents regarding protective custody in cases of child abuse, hero specific guidelines for handling cases of domestic violence, and information regarding adoption. He didn't have the time to go through each document, but he skimmed the majority of them to get a general sense of the processes. The hero specific guidelines he was at least familiar with. Though it had been quite awhile since he had been involved in a case like this, and never on such a personal level. The protective custody information was also fairly standard. Since he was a high ranked hero he had the authorization to initiate protective custody, and could technically sustain it for an indefinite period as long as he had reasonable belief that there was still a threat. A court order or Hero Committee ruling would be required to remove Katsuki from his custody if he refused to return him to his home. It was comforting to review.

The information about adoption... it was strange to read. In an odd way it almost made him feel

guilty. To even consider such a thing for a child who disliked him on the best of days and who he had nearly failed to protect. Had failed to protect. Despite his statement the night before, he hadn't thought about much else beyond getting Katsuki out of the situation. Still, Tsunagu couldn't help but wonder. U.A. had the ability to take custody of it's students in cases of abuse, abandonment, or death. It happened often enough that almost any accredited pro-hero school had custody abilities. Now that the dorms were being built it would be even easier for the school to take Katsuki legally. But there were issues with a school having custody over it's student. Even with the best of intentions it left the student without an outside influence or protector if they had issues with the school or instructors. There had already been a handful of concerning cases of teachers using a student's lack of resources to pressure them into any number of bad situations. Not that Tsunagu thought any of U.A.'s teachers would stoop so low, but the fact it was a possibility concerned him.

Shaking himself out of his thoughts, Tsunagu checked the time again. Fifteen minutes had gone by while he had been reviewing what he'd been sent. Quickly he sent off a 'Thank you' and set about getting ready for the day.

It only took him ten minutes to shower and get changed. He'd fallen asleep in his hero uniform the night before, and for a moment he considered putting on another version of it, but in the end he decided to go with a simple pair of jeans and tie-dye long sleeve shirt. Leaving his face so exposed was a bit odd for him, but he was hoping the change might help encourage Katsuki to trust him.

After he was dressed, Tsunagu took a deep breath and willed himself to relax. He let calm seep into his bones and stepped out of his bedroom into his apartment.

The first thing he noticed was that the door to the spare bedroom was open. A quick peek inside told him that Katsuki had made the bed and taken both the note and his backpack. It looked almost as if nobody had been there at all. The second thing he noticed was that there was a good smell wafting through the apartment. Huh. He wouldn't have taken Katsuki as the type to cook. As he moved down the hallway, he took care to make his steps a bit heavier. Not stomping, but loud enough that Katsuki would hear him coming. Surprises seemed like a bad idea right now.

When he entered the central part of the apartment, Katsuki didn't look up. The teenager still had slightly wet hair and was wearing different clothing, he must've showered fairly recently. So he must not have been awake for too long. There were a few pots carefully placed in the sink, and four bowls on the counter, two of which appeared to have already been filled with rice and meat. Katsuki himself was pointedly keeping his eye on a pot on the stove that he was gently stirring. Looking around the space almost everything appeared untouched, with the exception of Katsuki's backpack tucked next to the couch and his own jacket which had been neatly folded and placed on the side table.

While the fact that Katsuki knew how to be neat shouldn't have been surprising to Tsunagu, it was strange to see. With slightly telegraphed movements Tsunagu made his way into the kitchen and

got out his kettle. Since Katsuki seemed very dedicated to focusing on his pot, he just moved around the other to get water and put the kettle on the stove. Once that was done he set about retrieving tea cups from the cupboard at which point he faced a dilemma. So far neither of them had spoken. The silence between them wasn't exactly comfortable, but Katsuki was looking tense enough that Tsunagu was worried about scaring him off if he spoke. Still, he wasn't sure what kind of tea Katsuki preferred.

After a moment's thought he snagged his own morning herbal mix, a simple green tea, a simple black tea and one of the odder mixes he had hanging around that was supposed to be spicy. At some point he was sure Katsuki had mentioned liking spicy things, right? First he poured out his own mix into a strainer. Then he took a second strainer and held it out to Katsuki. The entire time he kept his hands moving steadily. Katsuki flinched a little when he noticed the strainer, but it was progress from the night before. Still silent, Katsuki took the strainer and spicy tea that Tsunagu had set out and measured out a tablespoon or so which was set into the second tea cup.

Katsuki's quiet demeanour was bothering Tsunagu. It felt too much like how the boy had been outside his house. Like he was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Despite his unease, Tsunagu let the quiet stay. For now, it felt important that he allow the boy his silence. At the very least it wasn't aggression or outright fear. A purple bruise had started to show on Katsuki's cheek, obvious against the pale skin even as the teenager tried to keep his face tilted away from Tsunagu's gaze.

The two of them stayed quiet as Katsuki finished up the miso soup he'd been making. In the meantime Tsunagu had washed the pots already in the sink, towed them dry and put them back in the cupboards. By the time the tea was ready, it seemed the soup had finished too and after a moment or two of shuffling around and pouring, the two of them were seated at opposite sides of the small dining table.

Now Tsunagu hadn't expected the food to be bad, Katsuki had been paying attention to it after all, but he certainly wasn't expecting it to taste so good. The fish and vegetables had been well seasoned and the rice perfectly cooked. Katsuki's miso soup was downright better than the one Tsunagu would usually prepare for himself in the mornings. He wondered for a moment where Katsuki had learned how to cook. Then his mind strayed back to how his parents had been too busy to come pick him up from the hospital after being kidnapped. Oh. Well that might not answer where but it would explain why. Suddenly he wasn't very hungry.

As it would so happen, Katsuki seemed to be picking his way through the food too. Alright. They needed to talk.

"Your teachers are aware of what happened last night."

The tensing was expected now. Wide crimson eyes instantly fixing on him while Katsuki's arms

were drawn just a little closer inwards. Tsunagu gave him a moment to process that information before he elaborated.

“I informed them and the rest of the rescue team as to what had happened since I needed advice on how to proceed and they needed to know why I wasn’t taking you to your house. As of right now you are currently considered under protective custody. All of them were worried for you and agreed with my choice to remove you from the situation.”

Tension lined Katsuki’s features now. After a moment’s pause, that tension started to shift to anger. Now that he understood what he was looking at it was so easy to see the quick progression of fear to a defensive fight response. So Tsunagu kept talking, hoping beyond hope that Katsuki would hear his words and *listen* to them.

“Katsuki, I am aware that you don’t like others helping you. Having seen a small glimpse of what was happening in that house, I don’t blame you. But please, this is their job, it is our job, it’s *my* job, to protect people. And Katsuki, you are a person too. You deserve to be protected as much as every other person. If any of your classmates were in the same situation, you would want us to help them.”

“That’s different though!” It was the first time Katsuki had spoken that morning, his tone indignant.

Tsunagu regarded him for a moment before deciding to try and follow through on that train of thought.

“How?”

“They’re- they aren’t- They aren’t me so it’s different.” Katsuki’s face twisted as he spoke. Trying to find words around dangerous ideas he wasn’t willing to voice.

“Why is it different for you?” His tone was gentle, but he could see his words hit hard. Katsuki struggled for another moment.

“Because they’re not- It’s different because-” The frustration was visible as Katsuki struggled to find the right words, growing angrier with himself when he couldn’t. It took a few moments of muttering, but the explanation that Tsunagu had been fearing and expecting finally came out.
“They aren’t bad like I am!”

Even as he said it, Katsuki seemed to regret his words. Shrinking inwards and biting at his own lip. His gaze dropped to the ground. Tsunagu wanted to cry at how convinced he sounded.

“Katsuki, can you look at me?”

It took a few moments, but eventually Katsuki looked back up at him. Upset eyes hidden behind a mask of anger. Tsunagu was going to need to speak carefully.

“I want you to listen to me very closely, without just shutting out what I’m saying. Okay?”

A pause, but eventually he got a nod.

“Katsuki, you are not bad. You have some rude and vulgar behaviors, you have some angry and violent behaviors, but you are not those things and you certainly are not bad. If you were really bad at your core, Aizawa would’ve expelled you in the first week. He doesn’t keep around bad students.”

He let that sink in a moment.

“I wouldn’t have bothered wasting my time offering you an internship either, few heros would’ve. I picked you because you had a good core and I wanted to help that shine through. You proved both of us right just yesterday, even though it put your life at risk to do so. Even if you have your problems, that does not justify her treatment of you. You don’t deserve that.”

His words seemed to tear Katsuki down the middle. Between wanting desperately to believe him and an angry defensive conviction that he was lying. In the end, Katsuki seemed unable to make up his mind and switched arguments entirely.

“I-she- It’s not that bad most of time. Really. Most of the time I’m not such a bitch about it and I fight back. I mean, I’d never hit her, but I can dodge shit, or yell, or just fucking leave. I was just tired yesterday because of all the shit before. Plus she was stressed because of the whole kidnapping thing too. It’s fine. I can deal with it now I’ve slept.”

Tsunagu was lost for what to say. All of the sudden the chasm was back from the car ride, but this

time he knew what it was. Only he didn't know how to mend anything when there was such a distance between the two sides, not just across but in height. The divide was so fundamental that it felt like the surfaces might never meet.

How do you explain to a child that a home isn't meant to be a warzone? How do you explain that a home is meant to be a place of safety and comfort when all someone has ever known was a battlefield?

Then a thought hit him, it was half put together at best but he distinctly recalled Present Mic mentioning that Katsuki had grown up with Midoriya, Aizawa's infamous Problem Child. He didn't know much about the other boy, but he had heard All-Might speak fondly of him and his mother. Perhaps there was a chance he could still find a bridge.

"When you were younger, you were close with a boy named Midoriya, correct?"

Katsuki stilled, clearly thrown off by the topic change. His gaze narrowed, but he nodded nonetheless.

"I mean I knew Deku, yeah, he followed me around for ages. Still does. Fucker even followed me to the damn hideout."

Putting the foul language aside, Tsunagu pushed forward.

"I assume you went over to his house when you were younger? And you knew his mother?"

A little bit of the irritation faded from crimson eyes, replaced instead by confusion. Again though, Katsuki nodded.

"Yeah, I mean, when we were little I was over there all the time. And course I know Auntie Inko. I still see her around sometimes, she's friend with my mom."

That was better than Tsunagu could have hoped for. It was also interesting to him that he called her Auntie without a trace of anger or mockery. He'd let the others know that she should definitely be interviewed for information. Still, right now he had to focus on this.

“When you were over at her house, what did it feel like? What did she do when you got angry?”

Katsuki’s brow furrowed at the questions. For a moment Tsunagu thought he might refuse to answer, but it seemed the boy was invested enough in the conversation to at least try.

“I dunno, like, a house? I mean, it was nice usually since she and Deku were both fucking crybabies so they didn’t try anything. Even when I’d get mad and yell or hit Deku ‘cause he was being dumb she was such a pushover that she’d just fucking talk at me until I apologized. I stopped yelling most of the time when I was over there mostly ‘cause one of ‘em would usually start crying and I was sick of it. It’s no wonder Deku ended up being such a weakling.”

Even though his words were harsh, the fondness underlying them was easy to detect. Just talking about the memories appeared to have relaxed Katsuki a bit, his eyes a little less focused and his posture looser.

“So you’d say you felt safe there? Like even if you messed something up you didn’t think anything bad would happen?”

Katsuki snorted at that, disbelief coloring his tone.

“Of course, what was she gonna do? Fucking talk me to death? Half the time she wouldn’t even notice when I did something wrong. Hell she’d usually fuss over me when I fucked up and dropped a glass or something and I’d have to tell her it was fine and that I wasn’t a crybaby like Deku. But they were always weird like that.”

This next part was make or break, but Tsunagu could see a path now to start mending the chasm in front of him. Like hell he wasn’t going to take it.

“Katsuki, that is what a home should feel like. What you experienced in her house wasn’t weakness or cowardice, it was nurturing and it’s what your own parents should’ve been doing.”

Tsunagu held up a hand to cut off Katsuki’s protests, pressing forward now that the boy was listening to him.

“Children are supposed feel safe in their homes, a home is supposed to be a place that you can recover from the rest of the world, where people are on your side, and where you are loved. It

shouldn't be a warzone. You shouldn't be feeling like you need to fight to not be hurt in your own house. A home should be the place that you feel safe to cry in, make mistakes in and learn in because that is what children are supposed to be doing.”

Another pause as Katsuki tried to process what he was being told. At the very least he was thinking about it now.

“I think you know what you went through wasn’t okay too. You know that you would be unwilling to leave your friends in the same situation, so you understand that it’s a bad situation, but it’s familiar to you. You grew up with it and you’ve never known anything else so you hold onto anger because even though it hurts, at least you understand pain. You’ve been convinced that you deserve this, and nobody has bothered to tell you otherwise, so you stay in a comfortable bubble of hatred.”

That hit home. Katsuki tensed up, his eyes now close to slits, teeth grinding together. Still, Tsunagu pressed on. He needed to break down these walls now while he had an opening, because if he didn’t they’d be built back up twice as strong as before.

“But Katsuki, and I need you to listen to me when I say this-”

He paused, giving Katsuki a second to refocus on him. That fiery gaze bore into him, and it took a lot for Tsunagu to meet its intensity. But he didn’t waiver or back down because he meant what he was fucking saying and he needed Katsuki to understand that.

“You do not deserve that. You deserve to be treated kindly even when you make mistakes. You deserve to be helped when you fall down, and you deserve to have emotions outside of anger. I know kindness isn’t familiar to you. I know you’ve been taught that accepting or needing help is weakness, and I know how scary this must be for you to break what’s been drilled into your head for years. But I also know that you are very brave. So I need you to be brave now and be willing to step out of your bubble to let other people help you. Can you do that for me?”

Tears had gathered at the corners of Katsuki’s eyes. He seemed to be near shaking, trying to hold back from crying. Still though, he held Tsunagu’s gaze and *listened*. Emotions and expressions morphed across his face as he went through an internal battle that Tsunagu could only guess at. Long seconds ticked by and Tsunagu began to worry that he had said the wrong thing, until Katsuki’s eyes refocused.

Those tears were now threatening to spill over, but there was a determination shining through. Katsuki’s mouth opened, then closed, his words wouldn’t come out. He gave up after a moment

and nodded instead. It was enough. The shaking got worse as he tried to reel in the flood of emotions he wasn't used to.

Tsunagu carefully stood up from his seat and rounded the table, keeping his movements easy to track and hands in sight. Ever so slowly, he held out a hand to Katsuki. God he looked so much smaller than Tsunagu remembered. His hand was eyed for a moment. There was fear in Katsuki's gaze, now out in the open instead of carefully hidden behind disgust and anger. But Katsuki closed his eyes tightly, gathered his courage, and reached up to take it with that same blazing determination.

From there it was easy to pull the boy gently over to the couch and let him break down again. Tsunagu held him carefully and rubbed his back as he cried. The tears weren't the desperate sobs from the night before, instead they were quieter. More subdued. Tears of relief instead of tears of pain.

It took longer for them to subside this time, but they did eventually. Katsuki's breathing evened out, but his hold on Tsunagu's waist didn't loosen. Finally, the teenager found his voice again.

"What do you need me to do?"

The tone was so hesitant, the voice itself so shaky that it almost didn't sound like Katsuki's. But that same determination was present, that same flame that refused to be put out no matter what drenched it.

Tsunagu didn't know where this child drew his courage from. Where this heart with an iron core had been forged. Where in the violence and anger, Katsuki had still managed to find strength anyways. For just one awful moment he wondered what they would have done if it had somehow been turned against them. The world would have been doomed no matter who they had standing on their side. Only whatever it was in Katsuki's past that had stubbornly fixed him on the right track had saved them. For just a moment, he tightened his grip on Katsuki, holding the boy just a little closer so he could remind himself that he was actually there. Then he found his own voice.

"Let's start from the beginning. How long has this been happening?"

Chapter End Notes

Best Jeanist: You're human and you deserve to be treated with kindness and respect, as all humans do.

Katsuki: Sounds fake but go off I guess

Hi, My Name Is Sif And I'm Still Upset About The Sports Festival

In the end, Katsuki made a list. Verbalizing what had happened was harder for him than writing it down. He was only able to talk about some of the early parts before getting uncomfortable enough for Tsunagu to offer the alternative.

So now Tsunagu was staring at a list that Katsuki had composed of all of the various methods his parents had used to punish him over the years. How often each type had occurred and in some cases dates or other evidence added alongside an item.

Glancing down at his phone, Tsunagu wondered if Hawks' offer still stood.

Actually he was pretty sure if he just sent a copy of the list into the chat and announced his intentions to go murder Katsuki's parents himself half of the other pro-heros would be willing to assist him and the other half would turn a blind eye to whatever happened.

Deep breaths. In-out. In-out. Murder wasn't going to help anyone even if it would feel pretty good.

Katsuki was currently in the main room of his apartment, having finally gotten around to eating the breakfast he'd prepared. Already he'd agreed to speak (or at least write in response to) Aizawa and the case worker later in the day. He had also agreed to allow them to photograph his injuries (the bruise on his cheek was not the only one, his back had bruised lightly from where she'd slammed him against the wall and his side had also taken a hit from when she'd dragged him inside) and for them to interview both of the Midioryias after a little bit of convincing. Tsunagu had gotten Katsuki's permission to share any new information with the other pro-heros involved. Then he'd asked Katsuki to write the list while he talked with Aizawa to settle an exact time for meeting up. With a little bit of poking, Katsuki had decided that he'd prefer for Aizawa to come to the apartment if at all possible, which had been easy enough to arrange. Tsunagu had moved to his bedroom to make phone calls and allow Katsuki privacy while he wrote.

Katsuki had poked his head into the bedroom for just long enough to hand Tsunagu the list and then left quickly, eyes averted and posture as tense with nerves as it was with determination.

Tsunagu had been staring at the list for the past five or so minutes.

There were the things he expected on it. Yelling was listed as daily, with a sub category for threats, insults and other forms of verbal abuse. Hitting had been broken down to two categories. Slapping

had been listened as daily, but noted as “not hard enough to bruise”. Beating, defined as “hard enough to bruise” was weekly. A few incidents in particular were jotted down, one involving a hospital visit after he’d been shoved into a cabinet hard enough to bring down several bottles onto his head. Those were bad on their own, but it was the other things on the list that really got to him

Locking him in a dark closet for long periods when he failed to control his temper. Refusing him meals after failed tests or bad grades. Kicking him out of the house for periods of up to a week when he wouldn’t back down from an argument. Cutting his hair short after he’d refused to dress how she wanted him to. That one hit too close to home for comfort. Katsuki’s handwriting was more shaky as if he had been unsure about writing that down. They would need to talk about that at some point. Another item on the list was particularly concerning.

Quirk Restraint Gloves - Failure to control quirk - Weekly.

While quirk containment measures of some kind were common for young children with destructive quirks, it was highly unusual for a teenager to still be using them regularly. Particularly one with as much control over his quirk as Katsuki. Even though the boy used his quirk to make points and far more casually than Tsunagu would’ve, his control over the size, force and direction of the blasts was admirable in and out of combat. It brought up questions as to exactly what was considered a failure of control. Not to mention what was considered Quirk Restraint ‘Gloves’.

He wondered how similar they were to the ones Katsuki had been forced into a day ago. How many times Katsuki had been forced into restraints as a child.

Images of a certain sports festival flew to the forefront of his mind unbidden, now cast in a new light. He’d seen it. Of course he had, every pro-hero kept their eye out for the new and upcoming heroes. All of them had seen a sixteen year old chained to a podium, muzzled against his will on national TV, not because he had committed any crime but because they wanted him to accept an award. Because they wouldn’t take no for an answer. Because they wouldn’t let him say no.

Every single pro-hero watching and in attendance had just been fine with it. The symbol of peace himself had stuck a damn medal in the boy’s mouth when he still tried to refuse.

No wonder Katsuki didn’t trust his teachers enough to reach out for help.

No wonder Katsuki had thought Tsunagu would hit him.

Parallels formed in his mind unbidden. A boy chained to a podium. A boy chained to a chair. Identical muzzles in his mouth. A child held against his will because adults wanted him to do something for them. Wanted him to be a symbol he refused to become. That same boy, even chained, even held by dangerous people, holding onto his morals with an iron will. Spitting in the faces of his captors that wouldn't let him say no unless he fought them for the right. For a moment Tsunagu couldn't breathe with the realization that the villains weren't the first people to kidnap Katsuki.

No, the first people to kidnap Katsuki and hold him against his will were the teachers and adults that he was supposed to be able to rely on. On national TV. While nobody did anything. While *Tsunagu didn't do anything*.

The more he thought about it, the more upset he was. Not only with the adults involved, but with himself. He'd blamed Katsuki for the incident, perhaps not directly, but in how he'd treated him. In how he'd thought about the teenager who had been trying his best while refusing to compromise his moral code. Sure Katsuki had been aggressive prior to the incident but in what fucking world was chaining him to a podium going to do anything to solve aggression? A treacherous part of his mind strayed back to the idea of U.A. having custody of Katsuki, only now his worry felt more justified.

Tsunagu had to put the list down. His hands had started to crumble the paper and it was important evidence. Instead he let his hands curl into tight balls. Gripping and releasing the sleeves of his shirt in a steady rhythm. The threads of the fabric flowed between his fingers and slowly he regained his calm.

Heroes didn't make excuses. He didn't have any for why he didn't act it in past, why he'd just sat back and allowed a child that so very clearly needed help to be treated in such a way or why it had taken him this long to question what he'd accepted at face value. But while he couldn't change his choices in the past, he sure could make a difference in the future. Katsuki was here. He was safer. He was alive. And Tsunagu was going to make damn sure that nothing like either incident happened again.

Very suddenly, Tsunagu found himself pulled back to how he'd handled Katsuki during his internship. How he'd been able to feel that something needed to change, something was missing and wrong, and that something needed to be fixed.

Maybe Katsuki had never been the issue, and that was why he'd been so unable to mend things. Katsuki had problems with his behavior, yes, that was true then and still was probably true, but the real issue that had prevented Tsunagu from dealing with those problems had been in how he'd refused to offer the boy the help he needed. He'd refused to consider Katsuki might be dealing with fears, hardships, or mental health issues. It had been his own holes, his own oversight, assumptions and failures that he'd been so frustrated with the entire time.

His hands curled into his sleeves harder. Breathe in. Breathe out.

At least now he knew where the holes were. Now he could start the mending process.

It hit him then that he'd been in his bedroom for an awfully long time. Katsuki was probably getting nervous. After a few more deep breaths, Tsunagu carefully picked up the list and smoothed it out as best he could. Luckily he'd put it down before he could do much damage. In the corner of his room he had a office set up for paperwork that needed to be completed at home, including a scanner. Getting a digital copy of the list only took a minute or two. He also took a pen and paper and quickly drafted a witness statement saying Katsuki had written the list himself and of his own free-will which was signed and then scanned to go along with it.

He considered for a moment, whether or not to keep the list private. In the end, Katsuki had given him permission to share what was happening with the other pro-heroes, and they would find out either way from the case file. Even if the records were sealed which they almost certainly would be, his teachers and the other pros involved in his rescue all had a high enough status to review the files.

Not to mention Tsunagu felt it was important that all of them understood the true weight of what the boy was going through right now.

So he sent the scanned list into the the chat. The original was placed carefully in a labeled envelope along with his statement. Then he turned to exit his bedroom, tucking his phone in his pocket after turning it to silent mode.

Fuckin' Nitroglycerin

Chapter Notes

Okay, I'm fudging how quirk restraints work in this. But like, canon doesn't really explain that shit either so I'm giving myself the green light.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Katsuki was waiting on the couch. He was curled up against the arm, Tsunagu's forgotten jacket on the side table next to him. It appeared that he was working through a worksheet, so engaged with the sheet of problems in front of him that he didn't notice Tsunagu enter. Sharp teeth had the corner of his lower lip pinned as he chewed on it while contemplating the problem. His pencil was carefully scratching away at the paper, pausing every so often as he considered.

Again, it hit Tsunagu just how young he was. It physically hurt to see Katsuki sitting on the couch and doing homework like any other teenager would, so soon after this same boy had fought for his life.

They were all still so young, but it had always been easy to remember that with the others. Somehow, with Katsuki he'd forgotten.

It was then that Katsuki noticed him watching, jumping a little at his presence. His shock quickly smoothed out into a glare. Tsunagu just offered him a smile and stepped towards the kitchen to retrieve his tea.

"I've spoken with your teacher and he'll be here around 2 pm along with a case worker. I passed on the list you made, they'll probably have some questions about it, but would you feel comfortable if I asked you a few questions now?"

A long moment passed while Katsuki considered the question, finally though, he nodded. His eyes stayed on his paper though.

"Okay. Let me know if you need to stop at any time, alright?" Another nod in reply.

"On the list you mentioned a hospital visit, you wrote down the name, but do you remember what you told the doctors there?"

Consideration.

“...didn’t tell ‘em anything. They didn’t ask questions.”

Tsunagu nodded. He’d need to pull medical records from that particular hospital then. Odds are she’d refused to give a name.

“Okay, that’s good to know. It seemed the bruising injuries happened a lot. How did you normally take care of them?”

That got a shrug. It was a long minute before Katsuki could form words.

“Didn’t a lot of the time if they weren’t bad. I just made sure to pick a fight with someone or spar or something so I had an excuse. Sometimes I’d ice them. I’ve mostly just gotten used to having a few bruise floating around between her, hero practice, training, and whatnot.”

There weren’t words to express all the issues Tsunagu had with that. So he said nothing and nodded again instead before moving on.

“You also mentioned Quirk Restraint Gloves as a response to losing control of your quirk. Could you tell me anything else about those?”

Katsuki tensed up again, but seemed resigned to some fate he’d created in his mind. Instead of replying verbally, he surprised Tsunagu by reaching down into his backpack. It took a moment or so of rummaging, but he pulled out two black shapes and held them up for Tsunagu to take. His hands were shaking as he offered them, but his eyes were determined.

This hadn’t been the reply that Tsunagu was expecting, but he moved to gently take them nonetheless. As he did so, he moved to sit on the couch next to Katsuki. Carefully he turned the objects over in his hands.

They looked a sickening amount like professional quirk restraints. Like the ones that had been used on him in both kidnappings. Maybe a bit smaller and a bit thinner. Not by much though. Katsuki refused to look at him. After a moment or two though, he spoke. Voice pained and small but firm.

"I brought them just'n case. I get nightmares sometimes and my quirk will go off. It's mostly just noisy. I've never caught anything on fire, but it's hard to sleep near. Sometimes she'd use 'em when I spark off inside the house. Doesn't happen as much anymore though, I'm outta the house enough that it doesn't get a chance to build up."

It took a couple of seconds for Tsunagu to process all of that. Despite his best efforts, his voice still came out strained when he spoke. Eyes locked onto the devices in his hands.

"She put you in quirk restraints after you got nightmares?"

Katsuki shrugged his shoulders, but still kept his gaze firmly locked on the ground.

"It's okay, they don't exactly help with getting to sleep, but I'm used to 'em. I can't use 'em for longer than 12 hours without washing them though, since they can only absorb so much before they just turn into bombs themselves. The couple of times she left on 'em for longer than that it did a number on my hands when they went off."

Tsunagu couldn't remember having to put this much energy and thought into breathing slowly in a long time. The implication that Katsuki either couldn't or wouldn't remove them despite risk to himself only made things worse. He took a moment to regain himself before he spoke again, refocusing in on the future rather than the past.

"Do you think you're at currently risk of accidentally hurting yourself or someone else without them?"

That got Katsuki to look up at him with an incredulous look.

"Of course not! I'm not fucking five anymore."

That was all Tsunagu needed to hear. Hm. These things were probably hard to burn. Could he get away with chucking them at Endeavor to get rid of them? Either he'd incinerate them or they'd hit him in the face which would also be satisfying. Probably not. Even if he wasn't going to get shit from the other heroes about it, the media didn't need any evidence of infighting with All-Might being forced into retirement. Okay, tempting thoughts aside this was not what he needed to be focusing on right now. He took in the indigence on Katsuki's face for a heartbeat, it was a much more familiar expression and comforting in a strange sort of way.

“If they aren’t necessary for safety, I don’t see any reason for you to use them in the future. They put you at risk, I doubt they’re comfortable to wear, and from what I’ve seen you have excellent control over your quirk so there’s no reason to keep them around. If you’d like I can help you get rid of them later once they’ve been documented as evidence.”

It seemed that Katsuki didn’t know how to reply to that, stuck between wanting to protest and obviously at least a little flattered by his former mentor’s confidence in him. Tsunagu set the restraints down on the side table and turned back to address another point that had come up.

“Though with that being said, you mentioned build up from your quirk? Does that make it more difficult to control or cause you problems?”

For the first time, he actually got a snort from Katsuki, before he looked at Tsunagu and realized his former mentor wasn’t joking. After an awkward pause, he found his words again.

“I mean, you know the sweat from my hands is basically nitroglycerin? Right? That’s my whole thing. It doesn’t stop being fucking nitroglycerin just because I’m not trying to use it. I can focus to make it more potent, but there’s always a base concentration. This shit can get set off by getting bumped wrong if I don’t do something with it.”

That... made a lot of sense. Tsunagu had never really paused to consider the side effects of Katsuki’s quirk, which was weird, because now that he was actually thinking about it he had about a hundred questions. The teenager had always seemed to manage his quirk effortlessly in and out of battle so Tsunagu had never seen evidence it was hard to control. Katsuki seemed to realize that he hadn’t considered the side effects of sweating nitroglycerin and rolled his eyes, though he seemed unsurprised.

“To answer your question, yes it builds up. Summer and winter are harder if I don’t plan my outfits right. It does make it more difficult to control if there’s build up. All it takes is someone startling me or basically any sudden emotion and that heats it up enough to ignite. Or hell, sometimes it’ll ignite on its own if there’s enough energy from other sources. Build up is also a problem for anything that touches me, since, ya’know, it’s fucking nitroglycerin.”

Yeah, this was making way more sense than whatever weird idea Tsunagu must’ve subconsciously had about the quirk. The sweat production was constant, like with most people, so dealing with that would be unpleasant at best.

“I’ve learned to start sparking off any excess the moment someone touches me so it doesn’t transfer over. I also keep sparking throughout the day to prevent build up or it dripping somewhere. Plus I rinse all my laundry with a mixture to neutralize the stuff before I wash it. It’s easy enough to manage now I’ve built up the right habits.”

Suddenly several things clicked into place at once. Of course the boy would be using his quirk causally if his alternative was leaving nitroglycerin on random objects or people. Tsunagu had always assumed it was just a superfluous intimidation tactic or automatic reaction, but sparking off excess was a far more obvious choice. No wonder Katsuki didn’t like others touching him either, beyond the obvious bad associations and personal space issues. It meant he had to be worrying about hurting whoever touched him.

“I... That makes a lot of sense. I’m not sure why I assumed it wouldn’t cause issues outside of battle. You handled the problems so effectively that it never crossed my mind that they existed.”

Katsuki almost preened at the compliment, it was a near thing. Instead he ducked his head with a huff to hide the hint of a grin. While Katsuki usually refused unearned praise, his control over his quirk was one of the few things that he prided himself on but so rarely got acknowledged for.

“Most people don’t really think about the side effects of my quirk. I don’t exactly advertise it either, I just let ‘em make whatever assumptions they want.”

His words were casual and accompanied with a shrug, but Tsunagu didn’t miss how he said side effects, plural. It might not be the best idea to press too much there today. Katsuki had already made several big strides in being able to admit weakness and pushing him too far would be counterproductive. Instead Tsunagu switched gears.

“I’ve found poor assumptions on other people’s parts to be a reoccurring theme today. On that topic, can you think of anyone else we should reach out for statements from? As it stands I’m not too concerned about having enough evidence to remove you from their custody, but it never hurts.”

That got carefully considered. Eventually though, Katsuki ended up deciding on a shrug.

“Probably not. There’s a handful of people that might remember something, but none of ‘em like law enforcement and I don’t know any of their real names. Haven’t talked to any of them in awhile either. Mostly just people I hung out with when I was kicked out.”

Fair enough. It wasn't that abnormal for a kid in his situation to end up tangled with people who wouldn't take kindly to police or heroes. The evidence they already had was quite strong anyways.

Glancing at a clock told Tsunagu it was getting close to noon. Katsuki seemed to be flagging. Even though he was determined to see things through, talking about all of this was clearly emotionally exhausting for him.

"Alright. I'll pass all this on in a little bit. In the meantime, is there anyone you'd like to talk to? I know you have your phone, but if you wanted, I could arrange for any of your classmates to come visit?"

He had a feeling he knew the answer, but wanted to offer anyways. A shake of the head confirmed his assumptions. The pause afterwards made he wait though, to see if Katsuki changed his mind.

"... I don't think I'd be up for it today, but I'd like to see Kirishima at some point. He's... good with emotions 'n shit. Plus he'll get worried if I stay away for too long."

He paused again, processing something. Again, Tsunagu waited for him to put his thoughts together. Katsuki looked up at him, clearly nervous to speak but pushing himself to do so.

"...What am I supposed to tell him? I mean, he'll have questions about why I'm not going home anymore. He's a bit dense but he's not dumb. None of them are. How am I supposed to explain any of this?"

If that wasn't a question and a half on its own. Carefully, Tsunagu considered his answer.

"That's really up to you. I don't know how public this case will be, though I suspect your parents will be willing to handle it quietly. Even so, there's a lot of media eyes focused on you right now. It's not going to slip by when a court ordered custody shift happens. The details will be sealed, but odds are your classmates will be aware something has transpired. They will probably be concerned for you, as you would be for them. However, that doesn't mean any of them are entitled to the details of what happened. Talking about things can be helpful. When you're ready I would recommend talking to at least a few of your classmates about it. But if you aren't, you can just tell them that. You aren't ready to talk about it, but it's being handled."

Katsuki considered that answer before nodding. He still seemed a little unsure, probably unused to establishing boundaries in a non-aggressive manner. Probably unused to being allowed to establish

boundaries in a non-aggressive manner. For now Tsunagu let it be. Therapy was going to be an important part of this kid's future.

"We've got about two hours left until your teacher gets here. Is there anything you want to do in the meantime?"

Crimson eyes turned back to the abandoned worksheets.

"Not really. I'll just keep making my way through these since I'm already behind, and text people so they know I'm okay. Deku's already been blowing up my phone since he knows I didn't go home last night and Auntie Inko probably heard the 'secondary attack possible' story from my mom. So I should probably deal with that before those idiots decide they need to run another rescue mission."

Actually, on the subject of thinking things regarding Katsuki through, it suddenly struck Tsunagu that it was summer. His eyes drifted back to the worksheet as Katsuki reached to snag it and his phone.

"... Aren't you on break? Why do you have homework to be behind on?"

Another snort in reply, as if that was a dumb question.

"It's not assigned, but I don't get good grades by just abandoning my schoolwork when summer hits. I've got a schedule for preparing for next semester to keep, so when we hit all of this in class it should be review. Plus between Kirishima, Ashido, Sero and Kaminari, I'm almost guaranteed to have to have to tutor someone on each part of the course. So I need to at least be familiar with it so I can teach it later."

Huh. Logically Tsunagu knew that Katsuki got excellent grades, he'd seen his record prior to the internship, but he hadn't been aware the boy had such dedicated study habits or that he tutored other students.

"Do you ever take an actual break?"

The question was a bit blunt, but Katsuki didn't take offense. If anything, he seemed proud as he turned his eyes to his phone while answering.

“Nope! I don’t have time to be messing around. When I say I’m going be the No. 1 Pro-hero one day, I mean it. I’m not going to get there without giving it my all. Besides, not like I have anything better to do with my time.”

Okay, there was a lot there. Hard work was one thing, never taking a break was another. The implied lack of hobbies or activities outside of heroics was a bit concerning too. Still, he also knew that right now was the wrong time to try and change Katsuki’s routine. Picking your battles and all that. So he left Katsuki to his work, instead deciding to go reheat his tea.

Chapter End Notes

I should note for this I do also think Katsuki uses his explosions to make points and try to spook others, but I also think it makes a lot of sense for him to do that since it keeps it in constant use? And like, you do not want that shit getting places. Neutralizing Nitrog is hard af and there is a reason that the actual irl way to deal with nitrog left somewhere is controlled detonation. Like, that's the actual method professionals use. I just want to see more people acknowledge sweating nitroglycerin would be hard af to control.

Also Katsuki 100% has amazing study habits and you cannot convince me otherwise. He gets ahead during the summer so he has time for all his physical training during the actual school year too.

Welcome to: Everyone's Pissed The Chat

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsunagu was suddenly reminded of his own phone. Which, while silenced, had been blowing up with messages since he'd sent the list to the pro-hero chat. Hmm. Yeah he should deal with that. Maybe he should've sent context too. Eh. As he pulled his tea from the microwave and started back towards the couch, he opened up his phone and scrolled to the top of the new messages.

Best Jeanist: [the_list.pdf]

Eraserhead: I assume this is the list you discussed with me on the phone?

Eraserhead: I'll add it to the case file and review it so I can prepare questions.

Gang Orca: I just went ahead and started to read it.

Gang Orca: And I mean, I don't know what I expected.

Gang Orca: But *shit*.

Hawks: okay i know aizawa already said no vigilantes but hear me out

Snipe: Listen, I'm not saying that this is a case where we oughta take the law into our own hands, I'm just saying that lots of people use guns and anyone could be a sniper.

Snipe: So if they were to be killed or badly injured by a sniper in a hypothetical situation, hell we'd probably never be able to find out who it was.

Eraserhead: Hello Listeners!

Eraserhead: This is actually Mic, I've been given Shouta's phone temporarily since he's somehow the admin of this chat

Eraserhead: He's locked himself in our bathroom and I'm under strict instructions not to let him out until he's got control of himself again.

Eraserhead: I'm also supposed to "be the rational adult in the chat" until that time.

Eraserhead: So I'm going to nix the murder talk now, even if it's just venting.

Eraserhead: I know we're all upset right now, I'm also very upset that this was happening under

our noses, but let's also remember Katsuki is now safe and won't be going back there.

Eraserhead: With any luck, we'll have enough evidence to press charges by tonight. Or if Katsuki is unwilling to press charges, at the very least petition for full custody.

Eraserhead: He's going to be okay, we're going to take care of him.

Snipe: I know we ain't leaving the kid in that situation, and I know justice will get there eventually

Snipe: But fuck, Mic, look at that shit.

Snipe: Guess I'm more pissed at myself than anything else. Kid set off some of my red flags from day one, but 'course I talked myself out of bringing it up with anyone else.

Eraserhead: It's understandable that you're frustrated, I'm feeling much the same. I'd overheard things in my classroom that I wish I'd paid more attention to and taken more seriously.

Eraserhead: Looking at that list now, I can see clear connections to things he said, things he's done, and how he reacted to people around him. I really should've been able to pick up on that, and I didn't. None of us did.

Eraserhead: Shouta is also blaming himself for not picking up on the signs sooner or asking more questions.

Eraserhead: But we can't change the past, all we can do is be better in the future.

Eraserhead: So that's what we're going to do.

Snipe: You're right Mic. You're right.

Snipe: I know I'm not the only one who'll be losing sleep over this for at least a bit, but we ain't letting it happen again at the very least.

Gang Orca: If there's one thing to be said about that kid, he's tough as nails.

Gang Orca: Even while going through all this he out stubborned Tsunagu, which is a first for as long as we've known each other.

Gang Orca: He's been through all sorts of hell these past few days and he's still breathing.

Gang Orca: It won't be a walk in the park, but he'll get through it.

Eraserhead: Well said. Katsuki's determination can play against him at times, but I've yet to find anything that can hold him back once he puts his mind to something.

Eraserhead: Even though it's almost certainly impossible, I'm still a bit convinced if he hadn't been

rescued he would've found some way to take down All for One by himself.

Hawks: Honestly from what I've seen from him, I'd buy it.

Ectoplasm: I once accidentally gave the whole of 1-A a set of mathematical problems designed for graduate students, which should've required computer modeling to solve.

Ectoplasm: Yaoyorozu noticed what they were and let me know later in the day, Iida had asked her for help close to tears because he couldn't figure out where to start. I sent out an email to let the students know not to worry about the assignment since it was well beyond the scope of our class.

Ectoplasm: Katsuki took that as a challenge and completed the entire set overnight by hand.

Ectoplasm: He got 9/10 correct, filled up about 20 sheets of paper front and back with his calculations and color coded the equations to make them easy to follow.

Ectoplasm: I tried to give him extra credit for completing it, but he refused and said that would be unfair since I didn't tell the other students they could do that.

Ectoplasm: He was just offended that I said it was too advance for them.

Eraserhead: Yeah, that's Katsuki for you.

Eraserhead: He's gonna be okay.

Eraserhead: Shouta's starting to chill out so I'm going to go check in with him.

Eraserhead: Mic signing off!

Eraserhead: My apologizes, I needed some time to cool off.

Eraserhead: Mic has already expressed my feelings on the matter.

Eraserhead: I'm going to go prepare for our meeting, as it stands we'll almost certainly be serving legal papers tomorrow morning.

Tsunagu finished reading through the backlog with the hint of a smile on his face. He glanced over towards where Katsuki was curled up on the other side of the couch. The teenager had paused from his worksheets to text someone back, looking at his phone with something between fondness and exasperation. After typing out a reply he yawned before turning back to his worksheet, eyes starting to droop as he refocused himself. Tsunagu turned back to the chat.

Best Jeanist: I've had a bit of time to speak to Katsuki about the list.

Best Jeanist: The doctors at the mentioned hospitals apparently didn't ask him any questions, so medical logs will need to be pulled to find out what she told them.

Best Jeanist: We also spoke about the quirk restraint "gloves" mentioned on the list.

Best Jeanist: Luckily for the case, he grabbed them from his house last night.

Best Jeanist: From what I can tell they're not a medically approved product, instead they're a slightly downgraded version of standard law enforcement emitter quirk restraints.

Best Jeanist: Given how much he's been through I tried to avoid pressing but from implications and the design of them he can't have put them on himself or removed them.

Best Jeanist: They also aren't well designed for his particular type of emitter quirk, I believe it'd be safe to classify any instance of their use past early childhood as endangerment.

Best Jeanist: Though given the discussion we had, I'm fairly sure even standard emitter restraints or almost any of the approved medical variations should also be considered unsafe for any extended period of time.

Best Jeanist: I've set them aside for now, unfortunately I don't have the appropriate evidence bag in my apartment so if you could bring one to the meeting then those can be processed as well.

Eraserhead: Noted, I have some on hand.

Eraserhead: Could you clarify the safety risk in regards to his quirk? His medical file doesn't have any noted risks regarding quirk restraints.

Best Jeanist: Emitter quirk restraints are designed to prevent emitting or absorb the emissions.

Best Jeanist: His quirk is constantly emitting without an off-switch, and while absorption is a short term solution, in his own words "it's fucking nitroglycerin."

Snipe: Yeah that'd make sense.

Snipe: That stuff's hell to try and neutralize.

Snipe: I assume the safe period is based on how absorbent the restraint is?

Best Jeanist: Likely, yes.

Eraserhead: I'll add a note to his file for medical procedures.

Tsunagu was content with that answer. While ideally restraints would be avoided entirely, quirks

were very tricky things during medical procedures. He would know, though he had no memory of doing so he'd been told he had almost killed a surgeon when he was a teenager and woke up during the process. Hopefully though it'd be quite a while before Katsuki needed to be under for any medical procedures.

Though speaking of being under, a glance told him that Katsuki was starting to doze off. His pencil was hardly moving over the worksheets despite his attempts to refocus himself. More interestingly, it appeared he'd migrated from leaning against the arm of the couch to just between the far and center seat. Closer to Tsunagu. Carefully he turned his eyes back to his phone, pretending that he didn't notice Katsuki's slow journey.

Best Jeanist: In lighter news, despite everything he has been through in these past few days, Katsuki is holding up exceptionally well.

Best Jeanist: He is a bit shaken, I would be worried if he wasn't after all he's dealt with, but his fiery determination has held strong through it all.

Best Jeanist: Right now he's fighting to stay awake on the couch next to me, since he's trying to catch up on his worksheets that he created in order to stay on top of his studies during summer.

Present Mic: I thought Izuku was joking about Katsuki making his own summer courses.

Eraserhead: Nope

Eraserhead: He was working on them during the downtime at the training camp too.

Another message popped up, but before Tsunagu could read it a weight hit his side and a pencil clattered to the floor. Not startling took a lot of restraint, but he managed to keep calm and his gaze focused forward until he heard even, steady breathing. Slowly, he peeked to his side where Katsuki had slumped over onto his shoulder. It seems he had fought against sleep until the end, his worksheets still in his lap. Ever so carefully Tsunagu shifted so he could take the papers and carefully put them on the coffee table. Once they were safely put aside he adjusted the two of them so Katsuki was in a slightly more comfortable position, and after a moment's hesitation, snapped a quick photo before returning to the messages.

Midnight: He is the most weirdly disciplined yet unruly student I've ever taught.

Present Mic: Agreed, certainly makes class with him interesting to say the least.

Best Jeanist: [katsuki-sleeping-the-sequel.png]

Best Jeanist: Despite a valiant effort, it appears he has lost his war against sleeping.

Best Jeanist: Aizawa, if you could just send a message when you arrive then I'll wake him up

before you come in.

Best Jeanist: For now though, I have reports to work through.

Eraserhead: Will do, see you at 2pm.

Chapter End Notes

Kirishama, trying to give Katsuki advice: pick your battles. pick... pick fewer battles than that. put some battles back. that's too many

But no seriously, this child is Stubborn Till The End and he's gonna be okay. It's gonna take a bit, but he'll get there.

You Can't Change The Past

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Katsuki slept until Aizawa arrived. It was surprisingly peaceful, even when Tsunagu awoke the teenager. He expected him to startle or leap away, but Katsuki just grumbled a little and slowly stood up to stretch.

Then again, he'd been through so much in the past few days, Tsunagu was unsurprised he was so tired.

Aizawa, Detective Naomasa, and the case worker spent about four hours asking Katsuki questions under Naomasa's quirk. After hearing his options, Katsuki decided against pressing charges. Some part of Tsunagu wanted to argue with that choice, but he could understand it at the same time. Katsuki just wanted this to be over with. Pressing charges would make the entire situation more complicated and taxing on him. Instead they would only be pushing for custody rights, which were easier to obtain and would likely only require a prepared statement. The entire conversation was recorded, so everything was kept professional. Tsunagu stayed in the room but remained silent throughout the exchange, his only role was recounting what he'd seen the night before and that was done quickly prior to the questions. It didn't escape Tsunagu that the sports festival wasn't brought up at all. Nor did Katsuki make any statement about it himself. Tsunagu resolved to bring it up with Aizawa himself after they were finished.

Throughout the entire process Katsuki remained a numb sort of calm. Twice he was offered a break by Naomasa who was leading the questioning, but each time he declined, and after the second offer Tsunagu lightly gestured to indicate that they shouldn't offer again. Katsuki needed to get through this in one go, pausing would only prolong it further for him. The teenager told them everything they needed to know in a factual, polite tone. Not only that, but he didn't curse once throughout the entire exchange, save for when he was recounting things that had been said to him.

Somehow that made the entire process that much worse.

By the time they were wrapping up, Katsuki was exhausted again. Though now the tired was something bone deep. What movements he did make weren't slowed, but his eyes looked hollowed. His tone was still even, but his words were weighed down.

At long last Detective Naomasa gave one last look to Aizawa and the case worker, getting nods from both of them.

“Alright, that was the last of our questions. For the record, my quirk has been activated for the entire duration of this recording and no lies were detected at any point. Statement end time, 6:26 pm.”

With that, he reached over and clicked off the recorder.

A wave of miserable relief seemed to pour off everyone in the room. For a few moments, there was silence.

Aizawa cast a glance to the other three adults in the room. Detective Naomasa and the case worker took the hint, each giving Katsuki a quick thanks for his professionalism and then exiting out the front door. Tsunagu did not take the hint, meeting Aizawa’s gaze with his own. Despite the many jokes regarding Aizawa and staring contests, the teacher backed down first. Instead his gaze was turned back to Katsuki.

For his part, Katsuki had moved his eyes to focus on the empty air in front of the table.

The carefully constructed professional facade Aizawa had maintained throughout the entire recording finally slipped as he took in a heavy breath. He closed his eyes for a long moment before opening them again.

“Kid...”

Katsuki looked up slowly at his teacher, eyes now not quite as hollow, instead filled with... guilt? Sorrow?

It was more than Aizawa could take, and he stood, moving around the table towards Katsuki. For his part, Katsuki didn’t flinch, but he watched his teacher with a careful gaze. With very gentle movements, Aizawa moved to rest a hand on Katsuki’s shoulder, ever so gently pulling the boy into a hug. The other stayed mostly limp.

“Katsuki, I am so sorry. I’m sorry I wasn’t able to keep you safe at the training camp, and I’m sorry that I wasn’t able to keep you safe before it either.”

The smile that Katsuki gave Aizawa was weak. It didn’t really reach his eyes, but it was there. Lightly he shrugged, inching back from the contact ever so slightly. Aizawa released him without

protest, allowing him his space.

“S’okay. I made my choice at the training camp to engage. I knew they were after me, and I fought anyways. Same with everythin’ before. I decided to keep it hidden, and ‘m better at keepin’ secrets than a lotta people think.”

The frustrated look Aizawa got was something Tsunagu could sympathize with, but he also knew an argument was the last thing Katsuki needed right now. So Tsunagu intervened, allowing his chair to scrape just loud enough to get their attention as he stood up.

Purposefully Tsunagu moved around the other side of the dining table, so he was not quite behind Katsuki but close to it. To the surprise of both adults, Katsuki unconsciously moved backwards towards him. Not much more than a shuffled step or two, but enough that their shoulders came in contact. It reminded Tsunagu an awful lot of a cat headbutting someone for attention.

Feeling a bit more confident in himself now, Tsunagu gave Katsuki a quick side hug, which the other leaned into ever so slightly before he was released. The teenager looked up at him for directions, and that at least Tsunagu could give him.

“Katsuki, why don’t you go get yourself something to eat? It’d be best to get some more food in your before you pass out, and I need to speak to Aizawa outside for a bit.”

Aizawa seemed a bit perturbed (and on a very petty level, Tsunagu was also fairly sure that he was jealous and that was just ever so slightly satisfying), but said nothing as Katsuki nodded and headed towards the kitchen. Once he had started on making something, Tsunagu lead the other pro-hero out the front door and into the hallway so they could talk privately. The door clicked shut behind them and Aizawa’s gaze fell expectantly onto him.

“I wanted to know what to expect for how this case will proceed, as I’m sure Katsuki will have questions for me later. The provided case timeline seemed generic at best, particularly considering the circumstances.”

The grimace Aizawa gave him spoke volumes on its own, and the other man sighed.

“Yes, unfortunately we won’t really know how this case is going to go until tomorrow. That’s when we’ll be serving the papers, and most of this will depend on how they react. Given that his mother doesn’t appear to be too fond of him, it’s entirely possible she’ll choose to surrender

custody entirely in order to keep things quiet. If she does, U. A. will be able to take custody of him right away, and he'll be able to move into the dorms in a day or two once they're finished. We'll have at least two teachers on site at all times during the summer for protection purposes, and the barrier should prevent any problems from arising. If she takes it to court, we have ample evidence to get the case over with quickly and force her into giving up custody. The only downside is it will take a little longer, might be a little more public, and he'll need to turn up to court."

That was about what Tsunagu had been expecting, but it didn't mean he was comfortable with it. Even if the dorms were technically safe, they were empty. Sure, Katsuki's friends could come by, and teachers would be around, but it was still lacking at best. After what the teenager had just lived though, being practically on his own wasn't good for him. And Tsunagu still didn't trust U.A. to be properly considering Katsuki's emotional health.

"While most of that sounds like a acceptable, I have concerns about U.A. taking full custody of Katsuki. Even with teachers around the dorms will be desolate until fall which is counterproductive for his recovery. I must admit I'm also highly skeptical of U. A.'s ability to handle his mental health."

It was clear that Aizawa hadn't been expecting an argument, his brow furrowing as he considered Tsunagu.

"While I'll admit the dorms are not ideal, there really isn't much of an alternative safety wise. None of our teachers would be able to take him as there's every chance that our own locations may be compromised. Foster care is out of the question, there's too much risk for him and any possible foster family. His classmates will still be able to visit him in the dorms during the break, as I'm sure they will, so it won't be entirely empty. As for your second point, I am perfectly confident in U.A.'s ability to manage his mental health going forward, even after this attack. Our choices are always made with our student's best interest in mind."

One eyebrow quirked up at that.

"Like chaining a sixteen year old boy to a podium with quirk restraints and a muzzle on national television rather than letting him refuse an award? That choice was made with his best interests in mind? Or deciding even after that incident that no form of counseling was required? Or not making any kind of public comment on what happened at that event, leading to a public perception of a powerful student as aggressive and mentally unstable?"

Aizawa froze at that, clearly coming to the same conclusions that Tsunagu had not that long ago. It was silent for a long minute while he reflected on past actions.

“Fuck.”

For once, Tsunagu agreed. He pressed his point.

“I want to trust U.A., I really do, but current evidence suggests that his case has so far been severally mishandled, and I cannot comfortably step back knowing that if something like that occurs again, he’ll have little to no ability to push back or advocate for himself. Already he was convinced that he deserved what he went through, and it’d be all too easy for U.A. to convince him of that again whether you mean to or not. He needs someone who can advocate for him, someone outside of U.A.”

Several long seconds passed with Aizawa looking conflicted before letting out a long sigh.

“You’re right. As much as I wish I could say that something like that will never occur again, the fact I allowed it to happen in the first place is already bad enough. However, there’s no one else who can take custody. His extended family doesn’t know him much if at all, and the only other person I’d reasonably consider, Midoriya Inko, is too closely connected to his mother for safety. Not to mention the amount of problems it would cause between him and Izuku. U.A. taking custody is the only option for getting him out of that household.”

The thought that had been hiding in the back of Tsunagu’s mind since Katsuki had curled into him the night before spilled out from his lips before he could think about its implications.

“What if I took custody of him?”

There was dead silence in the hallway.

Aizawa regarded him for a long, long minute.

“Tsunagu, I know you’ve gotten attached to him, but that’s not something you can do lightly. You’re moving up to No. 3 soon since All-Might is retiring, and that’ll be keeping you busy as all hell. You don’t have any experience with having kids, let alone a teenager with serious emotional issues. This isn’t something you can do out of obligation either. You know how Katsuki would feel if he thought he was being a burden or if he thinks this was done out of pity.”

They were valid points, but none severed to deter Tsunagu. Now that he’d said it out loud, the idea

didn't seem so crazy.

"I'm aware it's not something I can do lightly, nor would I ever intend to take such responsibility unless it was something I felt I could commit myself to fully. Yes, I'll be busy, but I can manage my schedule so that I'd have time for him. I have sidekicks and set work hours for a reason. Once the school year comes around he'd be living at U.A. most of the time anyways. I may not have ever had children of my own, but I've looked into adoption before quite seriously. Him being a teenager makes things easier, he's mostly self-sufficient by this point. My job will be guiding him more than anything else, a responsibility I was already willing to take on once and am willing to do so again."

He paused, considering his words carefully.

"Yes, he is going to be dealing with serious emotional issues, but that's something I am willing to help with as best I can. In any case, it would only be adding on an extra layer of support compared to U.A. taking custody."

Another pause as he considered the last point.

"I can't say I'm a hundred percent sure yet, I think I need to speak with Kugo before I'll know for certain, but like I said, I've been considering adopting for quite awhile now. I wouldn't be taking him out of pity or obligation, I'd be taking him because I care about him and I want to help him on his journey."

He finished his statement looking Aizawa in the eye as the other considered him again, more seriously this time. After a moment, the teacher relented.

"Speak to Kugo about it first, and then if you're certain it's something you want to do, ask Katsuki. If he agrees, I'd be willing to advocate for it. He'd be safer with you than he would be at the dorms. He'd have a more normal home-life which would provide him with stability and support, and if U.A. were to make poor choices regarding him again, I would trust you to stand up for him. But I'll need to know by noon tomorrow, and you'd need to accompany me to his house, since the papers require that the party whose petitioning for custody be present and listed."

Tsunagu nodded, already lost in thought as he tried to reflect on his own emotions. Aizawa gave him a nod in return, and turned to head for the elevator.

Looks like he'd need to give Kugo a call.

First though, Tsunagu made his way back into his apartment, unsurprised to find that Katsuki had gone to bed. It seems the other had made a quick soba and left some out in a bowl. Instead of sitting down to eat, Tsunagu slipped back to the bedroom. After listening at the door for a moment, he opened it ever so slightly to peer inside.

Just enough to make sure Katsuki was really there, curled up on the bed and out like a light, the nightlight still glowing in the corner of the room. He stayed there for a minute or so, watching the teenager sleep quietly. Slowly his eyes glanced around the room, Katsuki's bag was at the foot of the bed, his worksheets having been moved to the nightstand and his clothes from the day before tucked into a corner.

Something about the scene felt right. Like maybe it was meant to be this way.

Quietly he closed the door and went to the kitchen to take the bowl of soba while pulling out his phone to call his friend.

Somehow, he wasn't surprised when Kugo only laughed at him when he asked for help with the choice.

"Tsunagu, buddy, you've been trying to adopt that kid since he walked into your office for the first time."

That felt a little unfair, even though Tsunagu knew it definitely wasn't.

"I can hear you pouting over the phone line. Eat your dinner, go to bed, and talk to the kid about it in the morning."

Oh and there was a whole new thing for him to worry about.

"Wait, what am I supposed to do if he says no? Should I try and convince him or leave it be? Or what if he says yes but it's clear he doesn't actually like the idea? Or what if-"

"If he says no, talk to him about why. Don't try to push it, but try to understand. I don't think he'll say no though, everything I've heard about that kid tells me if he trusts you enough to fall asleep

on you twice, odds are he'd trust you as a parental figure.”

Tsunagu sighed, but Kugo was making sense. He usually did those few times Tsunagu ran into a situation that he couldn't solve himself.

“You’re right. I guess I’ll find out for sure in the morning. I’m just worried about how it could go.”

“You two are a good match, Tsunagu. I know you’ve been wanting kids for awhile now, but the risk of it kept getting to you. Him being your kid will do more to keep him safe than the alternatives. You already know if worst comes then he can damn well hold his own in a fight. He can push back on you too when you get to be too much like we both know you can. In the end, you’ll be a good influence on him. Not to mention out of all the people involved in this mess, you’re the most qualified to take him. Do what you do best, start mending things, don’t make excuses, and handle whatever comes like you always do.”

That got a smile out of him. He could tell Kugo was smiling too on the other end of the line.

“Thank you Kugo, I’ll let everyone know what he says in the morning.”

“No problem Tsu, I’ll be waiting to hear from you about whether or not I get to be an uncle.”

That got a snort from Tsunagu, his smile widening slightly.

“Goodnight Killer.”

“Night Jeans.”

With that, he decided to take his friends advice, finishing up the soba and heading off to bed. Tomorrow was going to be a pretty damn big day one way or another.

Chapter End Notes

Katsuki is one of those cats that likes a handful of people at most and gourches at everyone else for daring to exist in his space.

Choice

Chapter Notes

Look me in my eyes and try to tell me Izuku "I tried to take on the sludge villain quirkless, broke my bones trying to protect, then risked my life and career again right after to save Kacchan despite there being like 10 pro-heros already in charge of doing that" Midoryia would find out that Katsuki was chained to a podium and had a medal shoved into his mouth by his mentor and would just be totally fine with that without any comment. Look me in the eyes. Canon can try, but I will not be accepting it.

[Also some recommended listening for this chapter](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

This time when morning came, Tsunagu was up at his normal time. 6:55 am on the dot, five minutes before his alarm would go off. The sun had already risen and was peeking in through the window. For a minute or two he stayed in his bed, his breathing slow as he let himself rest just a little longer.

Faint noises from the kitchen convinced him to get up properly. He turned off his alarm and went to shower. As soon as he stepped out and started to redress, it hit him that Katsuki probably didn't take more than a few days worth of clothing. Hm. They could probably collect some of his things when they went by today. After adding onto his mental to-do list asking Katsuki what else he might need from his house, since there was every chance his mother could try to destroy his things out of spite, Tsunagu finished up getting dressed and exited his bed room. Today he had a more casual version of his hero outfit, one without the face covering. He could put on a scarf before heading out.

As he headed towards the kitchen he checked his phone for any new messages. There wasn't much. His agency manager, bless her, had contacted him to let him know he was on leave for the next week after which he'd be approved for light duty. Even though he'd been almost completely healed up after the fight, overexertion or further injury would take a heavy toll on him. Usually he'd protest, point out that he was fine and that it was imperative that he return to his duties as soon as possible. For once though, he just texted her back a confirmation and his gratitude. A week would give him time to help Katsuki settle in, and since the hideout raid had taken several higher ranking pros out of commission, a few international heros had been called in to help keep things moving smoothly in the aftermath.

Only a few seconds passed before she had messaged him back, so he paused to answer her.

Boss Lady: No problem, you'll need to talk to PR soon though about how you want to handle announcing your new kid.

Best Jeanist: Kugo caught you up?

Boss Lady: Yep.

Best Jeanist: I haven't even talked to him about it yet, so nothing's for certain.

Boss Lady: Sure, sure, just get in contact with Karen about it as soon as the paperwork's filed.

Boss Lady: Also, you do need to file a mission report in addition to the case.

Best Jeanist: Noted.

Best Jeanist: Thank you.

Everything else he glanced through, but nothing seemed particularly important. There had been some updates regarding information obtained after the hideout raid as well as formal lists of who had been captured. Ragdoll was recovering well, though there was no word on returning her quirk yet. That was good to hear. No real information on the Nomus yet.

He tucked his phone away and resumed walking towards the kitchen. Katsuki was, unsurprisingly, already awake and sitting down with breakfast and his worksheets. Again he had made some for Tsunagu, along with a cup of tea. From the color it appeared that Katsuki must've taken note of which one Tsunagu preferred, and somehow that gave him more confidence than anything else could've.

Sitting down opposite Katsuki, he waited for the other to glance up at him before speaking. There were a million and one things to be said, but he decided to start with something small.

"Thank you for making breakfast. I must ask though, where did you learn to cook? You're awfully good at it for your age."

Katsuki ducked his head a little, but his shoulders didn't hunch and there was pride clear on his face, if a little reserved.

"Learned at a restaurant I used to hang out at when I was younger. It was owned by this badass old couple who both had heat-related quirks. I stopped by after school a lot so they started inviting me into the kitchen to learn some shit. They retired and moved away, so I haven't seen them in a handful of years, but they taught me enough of the basics that I've been able to keep improving on my own."

It might be worth seeing if either of them could be tracked down in the future. For right now though, it was nice to know there had been at least one set of adults in his life that hadn't been awful. Meant he would have at least some template for what a relationship should look like.

"They certainly taught you well."

That got a nod. Silence fell over them for a few heartbeats. There were hundreds of questions hanging around in the air, but neither seemed to know quite where to start. Well, Tsunagu figured that perhaps it was time to take a page from Katsuki's book and tackle the problem head on.

"I spoke with Aizawa last night about what this case will look like going forward. He and I will be returning to your home this afternoon to deliver court papers, up until this point your parents have only been told that you are under protective custody and your location cannot be discussed. It's probably for the best if you block both of their numbers before we arrive, as once the court papers are served there's no need for you to be in contact with either of them."

Katsuki nodded, glancing towards his phone thoughtfully.

"Ideally, your parents will decide to surrender custody. It's the smartest choice that they have to keep things under wraps. If they do, you won't need to see them again at any point. If they decide to fight the decision, then Aizawa is confident that we have enough evidence to win the case, but you will need to show up to court in order to testify. Either way, we're expecting this to be over with in under a week."

Another nod, and Katsuki seemed to relax a little bit. Now came the big question. Thirteen's advice popped into the back of Tsunagu's mind and he picked his words carefully.

“However, the issue of custody came up last night, beyond the obvious part of removing you from your parent’s care. Given the circumstances, foster care is out of the question. None of your relatives are options either due to risk, and as you said last night, you’ve never been close to any of them. Several of your teachers are more than willing, but also unable since there’s reasonable evidence that their own addresses may be compromised. So that leaves you with two options, U.A. can take custody of you, they’ve done it for students in the past, and you would live in the dorms as soon as they’re constructed. Your friends would be able to visit you freely over the break and there would be teachers present on campus at all times for your safety.”

Katsuki seemed... confused. His eyes were on Tsunagu now, hesitant. Like he hadn’t considered that he would have options at all. After taking a breath, Tsunagu continued.

“Or, I would be honored to take custody of you permanently. You would still attend U.A. and move into the dorms when summer ends, but in the meantime you would live here. I’ve already spoken to Aizawa about the possibility, and he’s willing to advocate for it. It would give you space away from your school and an adult outside of their influence should they make poor decisions regarding you in the future.”

It was really, really, really hard to not trail off into a ramble about all the reasons that this was a good idea. But Tsunagu restrained himself. Mostly.

“If you’d be willing to give me the chance, I believe I could be a good guardian for you. However, I also completely understand if that’s not what you want in your life. I know I made mistakes with you in the past, and if you’d feel safer under U.A.’s care, that’s more than sensible. It’s your choice, and I will do whatever I can to support you regardless of which option you’d prefer. If you need time to think about it, or you’d like to talk someone else, Aizawa doesn’t need to know until noon.”

Despite his best efforts, Tsunagu had looked away at some point during his speech. His eyes downcast, nerves getting the best of him. He looked up to find wide red eyes fixed on him, and silence hung in the air for several seconds as Katsuki processed what he had just said.

“I-Wh-Ha-” It came out as a splutter before Katsuki collected himself enough to speak. When he did, his tone was colored with disbelief. “You don’t mean that. It’s not-” He paused, trying to find words. “You don’t want that. You’re not thinking about this clearly. I’m not-” Again he struggled for words.

Tsunagu desperately wanted to interrupt him, but he waited patiently instead as Katsuki tried to organize his thoughts.

"I'm not going to magically become a good person. I'm not easy to be around. You know what I'm fucking like! I don't know how to talk to other people without being a jerk. I don't know how to deal with emotions outside of "blow it up". I'm an asshole on my best days, to say nothing of my worst. I don't know when to keep my mouth shut and I've got all the tact of a brick to the face. That's not going to suddenly change just because I'm out of her reach now. You don't want to deal with that."

It didn't escape Tsunagu that at no point had Katsuki said no. Or that *he* didn't want Tsunagu to take custody. So he took a moment and seriously considered what Katsuki had said, before responding, keeping his tone as even as possible.

"Katsuki, I'm not expecting you to suddenly become a new person. Yes, I do know what you're like. I know that you have anger management issues, I know you have issues with self-control, empathy, and interacting with other people. But the reason you have those issues is because you've never had anyone to teach you. You just said so yourself. The issue isn't that you don't *want* to be kind, or that you don't *want* to handle things in a healthy way, the issue is that you don't know how to."

He paused to let that sink in for a second, but not long enough for Katsuki to protest again.

"I'm aware of all that, and I would still be honored to be your guardian. I want to help you learn how to handle emotions in healthy ways, get better at communicating with others, deal with conflict, and be kinder. It will not be easy, I can promise you now that both of us are going to mess up at some point. It will not be a quick journey either, it will take a long time. I'm aware of all that. However—"

As he spoke he reached out over the table to tap the worksheets Katsuki had been making his way though.

"-I also know that you're a damn good student. It's not going to be easy to catch up when everyone else has a sixteen year head start. But like I said, I know what you're like. So I know that you sure as hell won't let that stop you. I know that you have more courage, determination, and fire in you than anyone I've ever met. I know that you are smart, hardworking, and hold yourself to a very high standard. Most importantly though, I know that you are good at your core. You want to help other people, you want to be kind and you want to be a good hero. I know that you can become that, and I want to help you."

Katsuki's eyes watched him carefully, and Tsunagu met his gaze evenly. The other still seemed unsure, staying quiet even after a pause, so Tsunagu decided to press on just a bit.

“This isn’t something offered out of guilt, pity, or obligation. I’ve wanted kids for most of my life, but I’ve never had any interest in taking a romantic partner which made things harder. Being a pro-hero also put a wrench in things, particularly when I started reaching the higher ranks. While I considered adoption for a long time, I could never justify putting a child at risk. So I let myself be content with helping aspiring heroes on their journeys. But you’re a very special case where I wouldn’t be putting you at risk by adopting you. I already care about you, and regardless of who you decide you want to have custody of you, I want to help you on your journey through life.”

Again he paused to allow Katsuki a bit of time to process that.

“I will admit I have reservations about U.A. taking custody of you given their choices in the past. However, I can’t say that I made the best choices during your internship either. So whatever you choose I understand, but I want you to make that choice based on what *you* want. Not what you think I want, not what you think others would want, not what you think you should want, or what you think you do or don’t deserve. Just what you want. Okay?”

The silence between them was deafening, but it was an important sort of silence. Katsuki bit his lip, considering Tsunagu with hesitant red eyes before dropping his gaze and nodding. Tsunagu smiled softly but didn’t say anything else. Instead he let Katsuki consider things.

Finally, Katsuki spoke, hesitant, but speaking nonetheless.

“What do you mean by U.A.’s choices in the past giving you reservations? The training camp stuff, that really wasn’t their fault. Nobody could’ve known that 10 high powered villains were going to come after us, and the teachers were doing everything they could to keep us safe.”

For a long, long moment, Tsunagu just looked at Katsuki. He was going to need to have a much longer talk with Aizawa, All-Might, and Nezu than he’d originally thought. Katsuki was legitimately confused. His only thought was of the one thing that the school had apologized for. Right. There had been no one in his life to tell him that what had happened there was wrong.

“I’ll admit, I do still think the training camp could’ve been handled better, but that is not my primary concern. Katsuki... I assume you remember what happened at the end of the sports festival?”

Instantly the teenager’s shoulders were tense. Defensive. His expression shifted quickly to a guarded look. Trying to hide the fear that was still present at just the mention of it. That was answer enough.

“What happened there was at best a series of insanely poor choices made without any thought. I still have no idea how I and so many others were able to watch that and think it was okay. While, yes, you shouldn’t have tried to continue the fight with Shouto after he was down, there was absolutely no reason for them to chain you to that podium. The fact that they would chain and muzzle a child, on national TV, as if you were some sort of uncontrollable animal is horrifying. There is no justification for that, let alone for All-Might to have forced that medal onto you when you tried to refuse.”

Tsunagu had to pause and take a second to breathe. It took a moment for him to get himself under control again.

“They had a million other choices. They could’ve left the podium empty and said that you didn’t feel you earned the award and so had refused it. Or said that you were still recovering after the battle. If it was so important to them that they had three winners on the podium, then they could’ve given the first place award to Shouto instead since you declined it. At no point should ‘let’s chain the child to the podium and force the medal on him against his will on TV with thousands of people watching’ ever have even been considered an option. Never ever. It was dehumanizing, abhorrent, and it branded you as violent and uncontrollable in the eyes of public. All for what value? Having the medal accepted? Establishing their authority over you and teaching you that as long as someone could physically overpower someone else that gave them the right to do whatever they wanted? Teaching you that you didn’t have the right to say no and walk away?”

Katsuki seemed a bit shellshocked, and so Tsunagu refocused himself.

“Your behavior that day wasn’t great, but theirs was downright villainous. As was that of every person who stood by, watched and allowed it to happen without comment. Myself included. The fact that after all of this, after they had decided that you were so dangerous that chaining and muzzling you was a reasonable response, they didn’t insist on, or even offer you counseling or anger management options only makes it worse. It was not the only poor choice regarding you they made, but it was certainly one of the most horrific. While I don’t think Aizawa would allow something like that to be repeated, I can’t say I have faith in the school either.”

It was a long time before Katsuki spoke after that. His voice was quiet, eyes looking down, brow slightly furrowed.

“Izuku didn’t find out about it until he saw one of the headlines the next day. He called me to ask if I was okay. I’ve never heard him sound so pissed. I yelled at him and told him I was fine. It hadn’t been that big of a deal. To stop underestimating me.”

There was a long pause after that, but Tsunagu waited because there was more there.

"He was the only person who asked if I was okay after that. My mom told me I was an embarrassment and smacked me around a bit, and my dad told me that was what happened when I didn't listen to adults. Kiri texted me that he thought I did amazing, but didn't mention the awards at all. Nobody else brought it up. I- I didn't- I didn't know what to do."

After a long shuddering breath in, Katsuki pressed on. His expression looked almost pained as he recounted the experience.

"Everything inside me was on fire and everyone else was just okay with it. Acting like it didn't happen. Or like that was normal. I almost made some really stupid choices because it was driving me insane. Trying to pretend everything was fine when it *burned*. But then Izuku called and he was upset too, and even though I didn't really know how to handle that, it- it made things a little bit better. Like there was a big fire, and everyone around me was pretending it wasn't real. Then suddenly he was there and said 'holy fuck there's a fire there.' It didn't help me fix the problem, but it was nice to know I wasn't the only one who could see it. He didn't bring it up again after I yelled at him. Afterwards though, he was really snippy with Aizawa and wouldn't speak to All-Might for a week. I had to yell at him again to drop it and stop trying to save me before they started speaking again."

Katsuki was looking off into memories now, a fond, sad smile replacing the pain.

"I don't understand Izuku. I don't know why he keeps tryin' to save me. I don't know why he insists on following me. I don't know why he insists on pretending he likes me. I've been horrible to him since we were children. I've bullied him endlessly. I burned his fucking notebook that he cared so much about and told him to kill himself. I can't even handle him looking at me without getting pissed off. If anyone has a right to hate me, it's him. I mean, lots of other people have a right too, but above everyone else, he should hate me. Yet he was the only person who called to ask if I was okay. When they came for me, he fought tooth and nail to protect me. Then when he's barely recovered from breaking his stupid bones again, he's fucking back out risking his life and future to rescue me."

The smile faded, replaced with a look of determination. One that Tsunagu had grown familiar with. Katsuki had made up his mind on something. Red eyes looked back up across the table to meet green.

"I don't know why Izuku looks at me how he does, I don't think I deserve it, but I want to become someone who does. I'm *going* to become someone who does."

As he spoke, his voice grew steadier and stronger. In his eyes, the ever present fire burned brighter and brighter, until it almost hurt to look at.

"If- If you really are sure. If you're sure that you're willing to help me become that person. That you want to do that. Then I'd rather it be you. There's been a lot of things at U.A. that helped me, that was good for me. But..."

There was a pause as he picked his words carefully.

"I'm pretty sure the villains came after me because of the Sports Festival. They thought I'd join them because that was who they saw me as. That's who U.A. sees me as, maybe not Aizawa or a few of my other teachers, but as a whole. If they had been the only people to look at me, I think I might've joined them."

The words sounded almost painful to say, but the fire burned on just as fiercely. Katsuki's palms cracked with energy and he balled up his hands as he pressed on.

"When it came down to it though, when they asked me to join them, all I could think about was what you had said to me. About heroes and villains, and what made someone one or the other. You told me I had a choice, so I made it and stood by it. I think I need that in a guardian, someone who gives me that choice. Like you said, U.A. didn't give me one. You pushed me to be a hero, you believed I could be one, but you still left it as my choice. In the end, that was what really saved me."

There were tears gathered at the corners of Tsunagu's eyes, but he dared not break eye contact to try and blink them away. Instead he reached across the table slowly to take both of Katsuki's hands which had been resting on the table. He was careful keep his touch to the backs only. Katsuki didn't flinch this time, letting Tsunagu cradle his hands gently, uncurling them after a moment of hesitation. It took a moment before words came.

"Katsuki, I think Izuku looks at you the way he does because he is quite possibly the only one who has seen you for what you are the entire time. A good person who wasn't taught how to be good. I'm glad that even with all the mistakes I made during my time as your mentor, I still managed to get one thing right."

A breath in. A breath out.

“I promise you, I want to do better. I want to help you be happy, I want to help you get better, I want to help you become the person you’ve made the choice to become. I am sure of that, I’ve been sure of that since you walked into my office for the first time. So I would be honored to become your guardian.”

A tear or two slipped free as emotion overwhelmed Tsunagu. He didn’t mind. Katsuki dropped his gaze finally, looking down at the palms of his hands instead. There were tears hiding in the teenagers eyes too, but they didn’t slip loose today. Instead, only a single word did, exhaled in a shaky breath as all the emotions caught up with Katsuki.

“Okay.”

Somehow, it was everything Tsunagu needed to hear and more.

“Okay.”

He repeated back, trying to say so much more but knowing that the other understood anyways.

They stayed like that in a quiet, comfortable silence for a long time. Both of them were processing everything still, and it took time to think things through. Finally though, Katsuki looked back up again. There was a new understanding there, so Tsunagu gave a last, gentle squeeze of his hands before releasing them. They ate breakfast in that same soft silence. It was something Tsunagu could get used to.

Chapter End Notes

Also, it's going to be awhile before this actually comes up in this fic, but it's worth noting there was significant chunk of time where Katsuki was restrained to that chair/probably awake and unable to do anything before the villains asked him to join. Like he was with them for at least 24 hours, and he probably had a lot of time to think during that period. So he's done some Self Reflection as far as my canon is considered.

Normal Childhood Activities (Feat. Hawks being gently bullied)

Chapter Notes

Something else I don't see people talk about with Katsuki that I would like to see addressed: where the fuck did he learn to fight and use his quirk? We've seen at least some of his childhood, and his school doesn't have any fighting program that we see. Neither of his parents have a comparable level of power to teach him with, or fighting experience. We don't see any mentor figure or ever hear him talk about taking classes or anything. Yet this fucker got the highest score on the UA entrance exam with no rescue points 100% based on his combat abilities. He also had figured out how to fly using his quirk before coming to UA. Like seriously, the amount of upper arm strength, balance, control, quick thinking and practice that must've taken is actually pretty insane. And he's doing that casually at 15, with a strong implication that he's been doing it for quite awhile by how well he does it.

Anyways the point of this ramble is canon evidence points to Katsuki being self-taught for combat and quirk use and the implication of that is that he was probably constantly almost getting himself killed as a kid in the name of training, probably set up a lot of booby-traps as tests, and almost certainly has some weird training quarry that's blown all to hell he'd sneak out to practice in. And I feel like we as a fandom need to talk about that more.

Once they were finished, Tsunagu took the dishes to wash. It was only fair after all since Katsuki had made breakfast. Katsuki moved back to the couch, and it was only halfway through washing the dishes that Tsunagu remembered the other part of his mental to-do list.

"Oh! I almost forgot, can you make a list of anything important you need from your house? If your parents agree to the custody shift than there will be a set aside time when you can go get your things while they aren't there, within a day or so. If not though, it might take a bit longer, and I don't exactly trust your mother not to destroy something to be petty. So Aizawa and I can grab anything you can't replace when we go by."

Biting his lip in consideration, Katsuki nodded.

"Yeah, I can text it to you. There's not much really. Uh, some of it might be kinda hard to access. She liked to snoop through my shit so I got good at hiding anything I didn't want her to mess with. I'll try to write clear directions, but if you can't find it, she probably can't either. Anything I booby trapped can wait until I can go there myself, since that could take off a finger or two if you don't disable it correctly."

Tsunagu was torn between his concern for the lack of privacy, and wanting to laugh because of course Katsuki wouldn't do something halfway. Letting himself grin just a little he kept his tone light and teasing as he turned back to the dishes.

"I wish I could be surprised that you apparently know how to and have set up traps in your own house, and yet."

He didn't even need to look at Katsuki to know the boy shrugged.

"I had an intense ninja phase when I was like seven and realized I could use my explosions to get pretty close to flight. So I got my hands on a bunch of guides, scraps, 'n other shit to practice setting up traps I could avoid in an abandoned house. Once I got that down, putting a few around things really I didn't want her to touch was easy."

Alright. That got him to turn around, looking at Katsuki with disbelief. Not that he didn't believe that Katsuki didn't do that as a child, it was entirely in character for him and of course Katsuki was smart enough to have managed it. It was more of a disbelief that he was still alive.

"You know, when most people say they had a ninja phase, it means they talked about ninjas a lot and tried to sneak attack their friends at school."

Katsuki met his look with a glimmer to his eyes that hadn't been there in awhile. He was grinning lightly. It was nice to see.

"I've never been most people. Besides, that would've been boring. Real ninja stuff involves narrowly avoiding death."

"I have no idea how you survived your childhood."

"My running hypothesis is that I'm immortal. I've been testing it rigorously and so far it's held up."

That got a snort.

"I feel like I should discourage that idea, but I'm not sure I have an alternative one."

With a roll of his eyes, Katsuki turned back to his self-assigned homework, having now made his way through the one he'd been working on originally and started on the next one. Tsunagu turned back to the dishes which he finished up quickly and put on the rack to dry. Once that was done, he snagged his phone from his pocket and unlocked it. There were several sets of messages waiting for him, but he flipped over to Aizawa's contact first.

Best Jeanist: After a long talk, he agreed to have me take custody of him.

Best Jeanist: Several matters came up during that.

Best Jeanist: But I'm going to need to sit down with you, All-Might and Nezu to discuss what happened at the sports festival at some point once things have settled.

Eraserhead: Agreed.

Eraserhead: For today, can you meet me outside his former residence at 2pm? The meeting should be fairly short, but prepare for the worst.

Best Jeanist: Yes. He's sending me a list of a few things he'd like us to grab from his house while we're there, anything he's worried his mom might destroy if things turn sour.

Eraserhead: Shouldn't be a problem. I'll see you then.

Best Jeanist: See you then.

After that, Tsunagu considered texting Kugo next, but hesitated. Instead, he pulled up his contact for Hound Dog. While he'd never known the man particularly well, he did know the other was a skilled counselor. As much as he wanted to put Katsuki in proper therapy right away, realistically it was going to be a few weeks. Media attention, the risk of a villain attack, as well as giving Katsuki time to recover all had to be dealt with first. But that didn't mean he could help Katsuki get on the right track.

Best Jeanist: Inui, do you happen to have a moment?

He was going to switch conversations after that, but Inui replied rather quickly.

Hound Dog: Of course.

Hound Dog: I assume this is concerning Katsuki?

Best Jeanist: Yes, sort of.

Best Jeanist: I was wondering if you had any recommendations for self-help books.

Best Jeanist: There's so many of them out there, and plenty that do more harm than good, so I wanted to be careful with what I get for him.

Best Jeanist: Particularly anything straightforward with practical examples and situations would work well for him.

Hound Dog: Any particular topics?

Best Jeanist: Conflict resolution, unlearning reinforced behaviors, emotional control, perfectionism, asking for help, and handling insecurities.

Hound Dog: I'll put together a list for you today and send it over this afternoon.

Best Jeanist: Thank you.

Hound Dog: No problem.

With that settled, he finally switched back over to the main chat.

Gang Orca: @Best Jeanist I know you get up at 7, get in here already so I can know I get to be an uncle.

Hawks: Wait

Hawks: Does that mean what I think it means?

Gang Orca: I mean, I'd say yes, but honestly Hawks I usually have no idea what you're thinking.

Gang Orca: Your mind goes weird places.

Hawks: Mean, but fair.

Hawks: Is Jeanist actually adopting the kid?

Hawks: I just assumed U.A. would take custody.

Snipe: That's what I was thinking too.

Snipe: Guess if anyone was adopting him properly, it make sense for it to be Jeans.

Gang Orca: We spoke about it last night, he's still got to ask Katsuki, might be having that conversation now actually, but I'm pretty confident on the answer.

Ectoplasm: Usually U.A. is pretty insistent on taking custody in a case like this?

Eraserhead: Katsuki's case is different.

Eraserhead: If Katsuki agrees, then it's in his best interest to have a parental figure outside of U.A. given past events.

Thirteen: Agreed.

Thirteen: All of us here will also do what we can to support him, but having a proper home life will be very important for Katsuki going forward.

Thirteen: I firmly believe Tsunagu will be an excellent parent for Katsuki.

Thirteen: And no one here is going to say anything to the contrary :)

Gang Orca: Seconded.

Gang Orca: :)

Hawks: I honestly can't tell which of you is scarier.

Eraserhead: its thirteen

Eraserhead: and im saying that knowing full well i can negate thirteens quirk without being able to do shit against kugo's.

Present Mic: Yeah, I'm on Shouta's wavelength here.

Present Mic: I'm just very glad Thirteen is a kind and sweet person that chose to become a hero.

Snipe: Agreed.

Tsunagu smiled softly, appreciating their votes of confidence and vague threats. It also meant he had to explain less. Actually, it meant he didn't have to explain anything at all. Instead, he went for a lighter tone since the past few days had been heavy on everyone.

Best Jeanist: Everytime I learn something about my son I get more and more confused as to how he's still alive.

Present Mic: He said yes then!

Present Mic: That's wonderful to hear!

Gang Orca: Took you long enough.

Gang Orca: I'll need to stop by once everything's settled down so I can meet my nephew properly.

Snipe: Hang on, I'm excited for y'all, but was it anything in particular that triggered that statement?

Hawks: Yeah I'd also like the story behind that too.

Best Jeanist: Well I found out, like many children, he had a ninja phase when he was younger.

Midnight: Please tell me there are pictures.

Ectoplasm: Wouldn't a good ninja not let there be any pictures?

Best Jeanist: As far as I know, there are no photos.

Best Jeanist: Because when Katsuki says he went through a “ninja” phase, he’s referring apparently not to the usual outfits or dramatic scenes played out with friends, but instead to the dodging deadly projectiles and traps side of things.

Present Mic: How young are we talking here?

Best Jeanist: He said it was around seven, once he figured out flying, the next logical step for him was learning to build deadly traps so he could practice avoiding them.

Best Jeanist: I have yet to actually see his work, but given what he described and his general ability to pick up new skills, I’m going to assume he’s good at it.

Snipe: I feel like at this point, I could reasonably be told any story about Katsuki and I’d buy it.

Snipe: Although, wait, shit, now last halloween is starting to make a lot more sense.

Gang Orca: Last halloween?

Present Mic: We don’t talk about last halloween

Eraserhead: long story short, 1-a and 1-b tried to have a scare war and katsuki decided he was going to be on his own team

Eraserhead: nobody was safe but katsuki himself, and me because he’s not dumb.

Eraserhead: Mic wouldn’t go back in the classroom for like a week afterwards.

Eraserhead: i was impressed by how well he knew the individual fears of 1-a and 1-b and the quality of his traps

Hawks: Wait, okay, not that I’m not invested in the halloween thing, but did you say he can fly???

Gang Orca: Actually yeah, I’ve got some questions about that too.

Gang Orca: I’ve seen he can use his explosions to propel himself, but I’d think calling that flight would be a bit of a stretch.

Present Mic: Oh no.

Present Mic: He does that too.

Present Mic: At the Sports Festival he was mostly just propelling himself since it was a limited environment.

Present Mic: But somehow, apparently around seven, he figured out how to use his quirk for what's damn near proper flight.

Present Mic: It's *terrifying*.

Snipe: We had a basic training exercise near the start of things, and I was helping with it.

Snipe: Basically it was "king of the hill", but I had a paintball gun, and the "hill" was like a 150 m pole they had to climb up in Ground Beta.

Snipe: Obviously I had my eye out for some students more than others. Midoriya almost got me with a quick launch.

Snipe: But we're a couple minutes into it and I'm fending them off pretty easily, and all of the sudden it hits me that I haven't seen him once.

Snipe: Not two seconds after I realized that, I refocus on takin' out a combo they're trying to pull and all of the sudden he slams into me from behind, totally knocking me off the pillar.

Snipe: As I found out from the camera footage later, he'd been weaving his way up through buildings and using some of the skyscrapers for cover until he could get far up enough that I didn't see him out of the corner of my eye.

Snope: Entire time he never touched the ground or any of the buildings, it's sorta like he has a weird jetpack strapped to each hand.

Snipe: He's not quite at your caliber yet Hawks, takes him longer to get up to speed and sustaining it is a bit harder for him, but he's still pretty damn skilled with it and it's definitely flight.

Present Mic: I don't like how you say 'yet'.

Hawks: Hey so if I put my wings on him, and had him using his explosions at full power

Present Mic: No

Best Jeanist: No

Eraserhead: No

Thirteen: No

Naomasa: No

Gang Orca: No

Best Jeanist: I'd like my son to stay alive, so to that end, you are not allowed to be near him unless an adult is present.

Hawks: I am an adult! I'm an adult pro-hero and I'm a rank higher than you.

Eraserhead: You don't count as an adult unless you can do laundry properly, cook real food, and go to a boring dinner party without someone dragging you there.

Hawks: What do you mean "do laundry properly" you put the clothing in the clothing sink, you put the soap in, you turn it on and then once it beeps you move it to the clothing oven.

Hawks: It's not that hard.

Best Jeanist: ... I'm now requiring two adults to be present before you're allowed to be near Katsuki.

Tsunagu put his phone down after sending that message. For all his talk, he still found himself grinning at Hawk's antics. He was standing by that restriction though. Hawks was a dedicated and powerful hero, but he was by no means a functional human being. Tsunagu was not going to risk him rubbing off on Katsuki.

For now though, he had several reports to take care of, a PR manager to contact, and he still needed to pick what scarf he wanted to wear while speaking to his son's soon-to-be former parents. Usually he tried to stick to cool colors with his hero outfit, but today he was feeling a dark red would be most appropriate. That narrowed it down to one of ten. Hm. Well, he still had a few hours to decide. Maybe he could ask for Katsuki's opinion, the punk style usually didn't fit Tsunagu, but today he thought it just might.

Silence Before The Storm

Chapter Notes

I feel I should mention I do not know anything about the Japanese legal system, but it would probably be pretty fundamentally change by heros anyways? So just go with my nonsense for this.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

In those few hours, Tsunagu had contacted his PR manager to formulate a plan. They'd wait for the media reaction first, and depending on how much or how little there was, he could probably get away with just doing a single interview on the subject, maybe two. Since he'd mentored the teenager in the past, not to mention taken a serious wound while helping save him, it would be much easier for people to accept and move on from. Once that conversation had been wrapped up, he'd moved to the couch so he could work on his reports near Katsuki.

Katsuki kept pushing through his worksheets, pausing only to clear his hands every so often. The quiet had been comfortable, broken only by a question or comment every so often. It was strange how easy it was to adjust to. Even when Katsuki paused to spark off his hands Tsunagu hardly even noticed the action. Now that he understood the action it didn't set off any of his hero instincts.

By the time 1 pm rolled around, he was in a fairly good mood, all things considered. At the very least he felt he could keep a level head for what was yet to come. Katsuki snorted at him when he'd asked for his opinion on scarves, but still pointed towards a dark purple shemagh patterned with red flowers. Tsunagu couldn't help but agree with the choice, wrapping it carefully to conceal the lower half of his face and tucking the ends into the collar of his jacket. He also grabbed an empty bag for transporting the requested items. Even though Katsuki already knew, Tsunagu still let him know where he was going, that it should only take four or five hours at most, and that if anything came up he could contact him or any of his teachers for help. In response Katsuki had rolled his eyes, but still reluctantly promised he'd text if anything seemed amiss.

It was an hour's car ride to get back to the Bakugou household. The driver was the same one who had been so courteous last time, and Tsunagu thanked him when he stepped out of the car and onto a street that felt familiar despite having only visited it once. He had arrived with 10 minutes to spare, and after a moment of consideration and inspecting the environment he walked down the street until he was out of the line of sight for any of the windows. It wouldn't do for either parent to spot him and try to start a fight before Aizawa arrived.

Tsunagu used the extra time to inspect the landscape more closely. There was a mix of houses and apartment buildings. A park that had some greenery and a small playground. A few stores set up between the houses. Nothing really stood out to him about the space, but something was still

prickling at the back of his neck. A few people were out and about, but all of them were hurrying on their way. The park had no children playing in it despite it being a warm summer day. At least two of the stores he could see were closed down for the day despite it being only 2pm, and the one that wasn't appeared empty.

The widespread impact of a large-scale villain attack had never been quite so striking to Tsunagu before. How many people on this street had known Katsuki, or known of him? Known him as a loud, aggressive child with explosions at his fingertips? He wondered how many of them thought Katsuki wouldn't make it. How many thought Katsuki would become a villain. Looking back towards the dreaded house, his eyes drifted to the houses on either side. It was set apart from the others with a wall, plants growing in the yard to block out curious eyes. Still, he remembered vividly how loud she had been shouting on that night. More than loud enough for neighbors to hear.

How many people on this street had known and not done anything?

Down the street another car was pulling up and Tsunagu knew who it was. He started towards the house to meet Aizawa, leaving his pondering behind. Still, even though the street was almost empty, he felt eyes following him as he made his way back. Odd.

When Aizawa stepped out of the car, Tsunagu was struck by how tired he looked. Not that Aizawa didn't usually look tired, but he was particularly worse for wear today. Unsurprising given how much was going on between the creation of the dorms, the aftermath of the fight, handling upset parents and Katsuki's case. Despite all of this, Aizawa gave a rough grin when his eyes met Tsunagu's.

"Ground rules for this, make no physical contact of any kind, even to block. Dodge if it comes down to it. Or just take the hit and press assault charges. Don't apologize. I know you're a stickler for politeness and all that, but at no point should you admit fault or take blame for anything. In general we're trying to say as little as possible, anything can be used against us so the less the better."

Most of this Tsunagu was well aware of, but he still listened carefully. This situation was delicate, and things had to be done to the letter.

"Officially, we need to inform them that Katsuki is under your protective custody, we are petitioning for him to be transferred into your custody permanently because of their treatment of him, and that they can choose to surrender him willingly or take the case to court. They need to be given these documents outlining the specific reasons why he's being removed from their care, current evidence, and the court date. I've already got a court order that allows us legal right to enter the house and Katsuki's room in order to retrieve items he needs immediately. Anything else will

be determined after custody is transferred. Beyond that, we don't have to answer any questions or respond to anything they say. Any questions?"

Tsunagu shook his head, and the two of them turned towards the house together. For a few moments, they both just looked at it. As if it would have answers for them. Aizawa let out a long sigh and started forward, speaking as he did so.

"Follow my lead, I'm turning on my recorder now."

So that was what he did. As Aizawa knocked on the door, Tsunagu adjusted his scarf and posture. After a moment's thought he brushed his fingers over the buttons of his jacket. His quirk curled the fabric around them, making his appearance slightly more formal. It made him feel that much more confident as the door swung open.

Mitsuki Bakugou's scowling face greeted the two of them. Her eyes were narrow, teeth clenched, and her shoulders tensed. Fury was writhing underneath her skin, but she stayed silent, daring them to speak. By this point she must've known something was up, given Katsuki was nowhere in sight. Aizawa didn't seem concerned though, his tone was even and dry as ever.

"Hello Mrs. Bakugou. I'm Shouta Aizawa, Katsuki's homeroom teacher. This is Best Jeanist who participated in the rescue mission and was in charge of escorting Katsuki afterwards. We need to have a discussion with you regarding your son."

For a long moment she regarded them with that cold fury. Twice Tsunagu was sure that she was going to speak, but instead she turned on her heel, gesturing for them to follow her into the house. Without hesitation, Aizawa followed her and so Tsunagu did too, keeping just a pace behind. Neither of them bothered to remove their shoes.

In the sitting room her husband was waiting on a couch, concern clear in his eyes. He really did seem like a nice man. It left Tsunagu to wonder if he had deluded himself into believing their treatment of Katsuki was okay or if he was just a good actor. Hm. Maybe they'd find out. Mitsuki sat down on one couch next to her husband while Aizawa and Tsunagu sat down on the couch opposite them. This time, she was the first to speak. Her tone was icy cold.

"I assume you're here to tell me you lost him?"

That... That was not what he'd been expecting. A side glance told him Aizawa hadn't been

expecting that either. Both of them took a second to process what she had just said. The complete lack of self-awareness was baffling to Tsunagu. She had hit her child, a child who had just been kidnapped in a highly traumatic fashion, multiple times in front of a pro-hero while blaming the child for getting kidnapped. Yet the only possible explanation she could come up with for why she would then be visited by said pro-hero and her child's teacher was that he must've been kidnapped again? Despite there being no news of any further villain attacks? It left him speechless. Thankfully, Aizawa was not left speechless.

“No. Katsuki is safe and no further attempts to take him have been made by any villains-”

Before he could explain their actual purpose, she cut him off, voice growing louder with each word.

“Do you want to tell me where my fucking son is then? He isn’t answering phone calls, the only shit he’ll text me back is that he’s at a safe and confidential location, and this morning he stops even bothering to reply. I’ve been putting up with this shit for days now, and I’d like some fucking answers.”

Aizawa waited patiently for her to finish speaking, and then repeated himself as if she hadn’t spoken. His tone was still even, but it was now deadly cold.

“Katsuki is safe. There have been no further attempts made to kidnap him. However, we are not here today to discuss the kidnapping attempt that occurred three days ago. We are here today because when Best Jeanist arrived here with Katsuki two nights ago, he witnessed abusive treatment that required him to intervene in order to protect Katsuki from harm. Based on what he saw, he took Katsuki into protective custody and alerted the rest of the rescue team. After Katsuki was given some time to recover, he was questioned about the treatment and it was discovered that you have been physically and emotionally abusing him for his memorable life.”

Both Bakugous looked stunned. Masaru looked horrified by the accusation, while Mitsuki looked ready to go on a rampage. Neither bothered Aizawa who just pressed on, shuffling papers out of the folder he was carrying, placing a stack in front of them.

“These papers outline the current evidence that has been collected. After having discussed it with Katsuki, U.A.’s Staff, a case worker who has been assigned to the situation, and Detective Naomasa, we’ve decided the best course of action is for child custody rights to be transferred to Best Jeanist.”

Still ignoring their expressions, Aizawa plucked two more sets of papers out of his folder and set

them onto the coffee table on top of the others.

"This first paper is a copy of the petition for child custody rights filed by U.A. on behalf of Best Jeanist since we are helping oversee this case. The second is information regarding what a transfer of child custody rights means. Katsuki has requested that we not press criminal charges as he would prefer the case be handled with minimal public attention. I have a feeling that you would also prefer this to be handled quietly. So you have two choices."

Aizawa held up a finger to punctuate his point, his tone still cold but his expression almost bored, eyes looking off towards a spot on the wall. Really, the man's poker face was astounding.

"One, you can chose to keep this a relatively quiet case. If you choose to voluntarily give up child custody rights, then you can sign the petition. You'd forfeit all rights to him, including any sort of visitation rights, but there would be no further action needed. No restraining orders would be created barring future actions, no charges pressed, and since all details would remain under a sealed record the media would only know that the transfer happened. Not why. We would set a time in the next 48 hours where Katsuki would be able to come retrieve his things while you two aren't present, and then that'd be it."

A second finger went up.

"Or, option two, if you don't agree to the transfer of custody, you have the right to challenge the petition in court. There is a date already set on the petition. Should you choose to take this case to court, there is a chance that further measures like restraining orders, no contact orders, or possibly charges could be required or enacted. Further evidence may also be gathered. The case would still remain sealed, but the media might have access to courtrooms, so the public would almost certainly know why Katsuki was being removed from your custody."

Lowering his hand, Aizawa's gaze snapped back to the two of them. All of the sudden deadly serious again. It took a lot for Tsunagu not to shiver, and it wasn't even directed at him.

"If you need time to discuss your decision with each other, we can wait for up to an hour. I cannot offer you my recommendation, and neither of us can give you any information regarding Katsuki beyond the fact he's safe and in protective custody."

He went silent then, glare still fixed on the two people in front of him, waiting to strike. Masaru seemed like he couldn't comprehend what was happening, it actually looked like he might speak when Mitsuki opened her mouth instead. Red eyes had narrowed to slits. Tsunagu half expected her to explode. She didn't. Her tone was deadly calm, not loud but not quiet either.

“We’d like to bring the issue to court. I believe there’s been a mistake, and we want to challenge the petition. Do you have any other matters to discuss before the court date?”

Well. This wasn’t the ideal option, but it shouldn’t be much of a problem either. The evidence they had was ample and they would just need to do everything in their power to avoid media attention. Aizawa nodded, reaching for his folder again, taking out a last set of papers.

“Your decision has been noted. We already have a court order allowing us access to Katsuki’s room so we can retrieve some of his belongings that he’ll need before the court date. That will need to be done before we can leave.”

She inspected the order carefully, before gesturing to the stairway.

“Upstairs, second door on the left.”

Since she made no move to get up, Aizawa stood instead and Tsunagu followed him. Aizawa headed for the stairs, but Tsunagu paused before he left the sitting room. He turned to Mitsuki and spoke for the first time since entering the house.

“For the record, Katsuki is quite possibly the most dedicated, honest, and principled child I have ever had the privilege of meeting. You had a truly wonderful child in your grasp, one you could’ve guided and been proud of. It’s a dreadful shame you couldn’t see that. I hope your mistakes burns you inside when he becomes an amazing hero in spite of you. When you have to watch him one day, watch knowing you’re nothing more than a villain of his past.”

It was petty, but it felt good to say. Aizawa raised an eyebrow at him while hiding a grin in his scarf, and Tsunagu followed him out of the room without giving her a chance to reply. Neither of them slowed as they headed up the stairs and to the second door. He pushed it open and stepped inside to Katsuki’s childhood bedroom.

Tsunagu wasn’t sure what he expected to see there. His view of Katsuki had changed so much over the past few days that he didn’t know what they’d find in his room.

Somehow, he was still surprised. From the way his shoulders went tense, Aizawa was surprised too. Not because of what they found, but because of what they didn’t.

The whole room was... generic. It looked like it was intended for a stock photo shoot of 'male high school student's room'. There was a bed with blue sheets and white pillowcases. A bookshelf with textbooks and a few works of fiction that Tsunagu would bet anything was assigned reading at some point, a laptop with no decorations, a hamper in the corner and little else. Katsuki had won a number of awards in his younger years, but none of them were present here. There were no posters. No trinkets. No photos. Just office supplies and some neatly stacked papers.

It felt wrong.

Aizawa turned to look at him, his expression clearly conveying his own discomfort. There wasn't much to be done about it though, so instead Tsunagu pulled up his phone and scrolled to Katsuki's text.

Katsuki Bakugou:

Laptop (should still be on desk)

Heroics Studies Volume 3 (Bookshelf, top shelf on the right side)

Learning English: Practice Workbook (Bookshelf, top shelf, left side)

Katsuki Bakugou: Then there are two lock boxes.

Katsuki Bakugou: One box is in the ceiling. Treating the ceiling tiles as a grid with 0,0 being the corner with the desk, move tile 3,4 to the right (oriented towards the door) about an inch. Once it clicks into place, move it towards the window by about half an inch. This unlocks tile 2,6. Move 2,6 upwards by 4.5 inches and it will also lock into place. In the ceiling above that tile which should now be accessible, there's a rafter. The box is behind the rafter, just out of sight but reachable.

Katsuki Bakugou: The second box requires unscrewing the vent in the closet where there's a piece of metal taped to the top. It should be weirdly chipped and look like scrap, but it can be used to unlock the third floorboard from the wall under the foot of the desk that's closest to the door. Just run it alongside the far edge starting from the foot until it catches. Don't push it down or use force until it catches.

Katsuki Bakugou: Once that's done, the floorboard comes up to reveal a small space with three wooden rods running along the bottom. From the wall outwards, push the first rod towards the window by 2 inches, the second should be left alone, and the third should be pulled towards the door by an inch. Once that's done, the board doorwards of the foot of the bed will be unlocked and the second box is in there.

Katsuki Bakugou:

Katsuki Bakugou: It's cool if you can't get either of them. Just reset everything how you found it and I can get it later.

Katsuki Bakugou: She's not good at anything that locks down if it's pushed too far.

Tsunagu couldn't do anything but stare at his phone for a solid minute or two while he tried to put together Katsuki's instructions. He'd been expecting something to be tucked away, maybe hidden under a floorboard or a drawer with a false bottom.

"What's wrong? Is something missing?"

There wasn't a good way to explain, so instead Tsunagu just handed Aizawa his phone. The other man was quiet for a minute as he read through the directions. Finally, he broke the silence, tired eyes narrow as he pushed a hand up to run through his hair.

"You know, this shouldn't surprise me. It shouldn't. Kid is incapable of half-assing things. Yet I keep ending up surprised whenever I find out about some new skill of his. Why? Why am I still surprised?"

"Well, when I asked him what he wanted me to grab, he said some of it was still booby-trapped but he didn't want to risk us being unable to disable it so he'd pick those up later. So I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised by this either."

Aizawa just sighed and shook his head.

"Alright, let's try to follow this."

It actually only took about five minutes for them to collect everything. Tsunagu was able to use his quirk to do most of the puzzle moving precisely and retrieve both boxes. Each box was solid metal and had a locking mechanism that prevented them from being opened, but that was just fine, he didn't need to know what was inside. The rest of the list was in plain sight. After a moment of consideration, they also decided to grab a weeks worth of clothing from Katsuki's closet. While Tsunagu did have spare clothing in Katsuki's size, he would still feel more comfortable in his own outfits. Once everything had been collected, Tsunagu packed it up into the bag he'd brought and the two of them left the house. Neither of the Bakugous seemed interested in interacting with them as they made their way out.

Each of their cars were already waiting for them outside. That was the end of what they had planned so it should have been time to head home.

Only it seems someone else had a plan too.

A certain someone else with dark green hair and green eyes who was waiting just to the side of the house for them to exit.

Aizawa noticed him first. While the child wasn't exactly hiding, Tsunagu would've walked right by him if Aizawa hadn't stopped. There was silence. Nobody else was on the street. It took a moment for Tsunagu to put a name to the face. Izuku.

Right. The two of them had grown up together. Of course he would notice them going into Katsuki's house. He was watching the both of them with an unreadable expression. Wary maybe? In all honesty, Tsunagu wasn't quite sure what to do here. The kid clearly wasn't backing down, and while Tsunagu didn't blame him, he also didn't want to say anything that would find its way back to the Bakugous.

"Is Kacchan okay?"

A loaded question, but Aizawa answered nonetheless.

"He's safe. There've been no secondary attacks."

"But he's not coming back here."

It wasn't really a question, but it was at the same time. The complexity of it earned him a sigh from Aizawa.

"I can't discuss that."

The silence from before returned, Izuku considered them both very carefully. He looked towards the house behind them, and then his narrowed eyes turned to Tsunagu. Now, Tsunagu knew that he had nothing to fear here. The kid wasn't going to attack him, and even if he did, Tsunagu would win that fight.

Somehow, he still felt a wave of nerves as the boy judged him.

Finally though, those piercing green eyes turned back to Aizawa.

“His mom hurt him again.”

The words were laced with old pain, the scarred hands at the boy’s sides shaking ever so slightly. Once more it was and it wasn’t a question. Both adults tensed up. Before either of them could say anything, Izuku’s gaze fell to the ground. His hands shook harder, voice wobbling.

“Don’t let him come back here. Don’t let his dad talk to him either, because Kacchan always gives in to him. I - He wouldn’t listen to me. But he’d listen to you. Don’t let him come back here. Please.”

Aizawa and Tsunagu exchanged looks. It was Tsunagu who moved first, putting down the bag and dropping down onto one knee to be at eye level with Izuku. Green eyes lifted from the ground. Tsunagu met them with his own steady gaze.

“I cannot discuss any specifics with you, but I can promise you Izuku; Katsuki is safe now. I can also promise I will do everything in my power to keep him that way.”

Those eyes bore into his soul and Tsunagu understood what Katsuki had meant now about how Izuku looked at people. Still, he bore it, and after a long moment passed, Izuku nodded. There were tears starting to gather at the corners of his eyes now.

That was Aizawa’s cue to step in.

“Actually Izuku, I need to speak to you and your mother regarding Katsuki if at all possible. Somewhere private though. Tsunagu, why don’t you head back for now?”

With that, Izuku was being ushered off by his teacher. So Tsunagu stood, picking up the bag and making his way to the car. It felt like he’d just passed some sort of test. He didn’t really understand it, but maybe he wasn’t meant to yet.

Regardless, all he wanted to do was get home. The drive back felt longer, but he couldn’t find it in him to work on his reports or even check in with the others. Instead he just stared out the window

of the car, lost to his thoughts. The weight of that promise hung on him. Not that he didn't mean it, he did, every word of it. But it had felt almost ominous. No matter how Tsunagu reminded himself that Katsuki was safe now, he wasn't going back to that household, or of any number of other reassuring things, there was still something off in the pit of his stomach.

Just to be safe, he sent Katsuki a quick text.

Best Jeanist: Got your things without any issue.

Best Jeanist: Unfortunately, it looks like the case will be going to court. Good news is, the evidence should be more than enough.

Best Jeanist: I'll give you more details once I'm back.

Best Jeanist: Everything okay there?

Katsuki Bakugou: Yeah.

Katsuki Bakugou: It's fine, I had a feeling this would happen.

Katsuki Bakugou: My mom backs down from a fight about as often I do.

Best Jeanist: Alright. I'm glad you're still safe.

Best Jeanist: You won't need to talk to either of them at the hearing.

Katsuki Bakugou: Izuku was there, wasn't he?

Best Jeanist: Do you two have tracking devices on each other?

Katsuki Bakugou: Nah, I just know he's nosy as hell and has almost certainly been watching my house like a hawk.

Katsuki Bakugou: Since it's going to court, I assume Aizawa's getting a statement from him and Auntie Inko now?

Best Jeanist: Yes.

Best Jeanist: He... was aware of the situation on some level.

Best Jeanist: I'll tell you more about it once I'm home.

Katsuki Bakugou: Okay.

That ended the conversation, but Tsunagu lingered for a second. On an impulse, he opened Katsuki's contact and clicked the edit button.

Then he froze.

Katsuki wasn't his yet. Not formally at least. But.... Katsuki wasn't theirs anymore either.

After hesitating for another minute, he clicked on the name line and changed it. Now it just read 'Katsuki'. He saved the change before he could talk himself out of it. Another message popped up.

Katsuki: Fair warning, once Aizawa's done, Auntie Inko is gonna call and it's going to take like an hour before I can get her to stop crying and blaming herself.

Best Jeanist: That's quite alright, nothing we need to discuss is urgent.

It was a little change, but it made Tsunagu smile all the same. Maybe one day he'd change it again, but for right now, 'Katsuki' was just fine by him. He turned away from his phone to go back to his thoughts.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku, giving a weird reverse shovel talk: If you ever hurt him, I'll kill you
Tsunagu, only vaguely aware of who this child is but absolutely meaning what he's saying: If I ever hurt him, I'd let you

Unimportant Things

Chapter Notes

TW For this chapter in particular: Minor self-harm.

Also as a general note, nothing from the current chapters of the manga will impact this story/be considered canon.

[Recommended](#) // [Listening](#) for this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sometimes, you forget things.

No, that wasn't quite right. You do forget things too, but that wasn't what had happened here.

Sometimes you forget the importance of things. You know about these events, facts, ideas and people, but you forget what they could mean. They seem unimportant, even when you can recall them. Like how much a favorite item means to someone, or how much can happen in an hour.

Tsunagu had forgotten the importance of three things.

First and foremost, he had forgotten that today was the day of All-Might's formal retirement. That the speech was going to air right after he had started for home. Or rather, he had forgotten All-Might's retirement was going to hit Katsuki hard because the boy didn't know yet.

Second, he had forgotten that the media was ruthless. If it meant a good story, news stations would bite at anything. He'd known that they needed to be careful about what got out to protect Katsuki's privacy, he had forgotten that they needed to protect his health as well. He had forgotten how much damage the media could do to someone who wasn't used to it.

Finally, he had forgotten the importance of the Bakuogus' jobs. He knew both of them worked in the fashion industry. Of course he did. He was a pillar in it. It was one of the things that had drawn him to Katsuki all the way back when his only connection to the boy had been a file on his desk. While he'd never crossed paths with either of them, he had seen their work and admired it once upon a time.

Tsunagu shouldn't have forgotten how much influence people working in the fashion world have. It was something that he'd prided himself on! It was part of his own role as a hero, and a big part of how his public relations team worked.

And yet.

And yet.

When Tsunagu arrived home, the TV was on. That wasn't shocking. Of course Katsuki would want to catch up on the news. The bag of Katsuki's stuff was slung over his shoulder. He was a bit surprised that Katsuki didn't seem to notice his entrance, but he just assumed that the other was engrossed in the current story. Instead of worrying, Tsunagu took off his scarf and hung it neatly on his coat rack as he slipped off his outdoor shoes.

A buzz from his pocket drew his attention back to his phone. Pulling it from his pocket he moved into the apartment. Huh. Looks like he'd missed several messages. Okay, that could be dealt with in a moment. Tsunagu looked back up as he almost ran into the couch. Healing his injury must've taken more out of him than he'd thought if his awareness was that off. Now that he was looking where he was going, he rounded the couch to the side where Katsuki was sitting.

Katsuki didn't look up at him. His eyes were fixed on the TV. He was curled up, knees tucked to his side.

That was weird. Cautiously Tsunagu took another step so that he was now in front of the couch and could take in the teenager's appearance.

The first thing that struck him was Katsuki's eyes. They looked blank. Dead. Gone was any trace of fire or mischief, any hint of anger or fear. For a single, awful second, he feared the worst. Then he took in the rest of the scene. Arms crossed tightly in front of his chest. Breath coming out silent but rapidly. Smoke coming from his palms which were tightly gripping his forearms. Face that same awful blank. Muscles all tightened, poised to spring.

It had been a long time since Tsunagu had dealt with a panic attack.

His hearing tuned back in, and all of the sudden the TV wasn't background noise anymore. It felt like he was trapped in slow motion as he twisted to see a new anchor wrapping up a report, a picture of Katsuki at the sports festival on the screen beside her.

“-there has been no statement yet from U.A., the Hero Commission, or the police force as to the accusations that Katsuki Bakugou has been stolen from his family to be used as a weapon. No explanation as to why he hasn’t been returned to his family has been provided, and there has been no word on why a new sealed case was opened regarding his custody less than 24 hours after his kidnapping. There also haven’t been any further statements regarding his violent and aggressive nature going unchecked, or the idea that he may have actually gone with the so-called League of Villains willingly. Further updates on this story-”

Before he could even finish processing what was happening, he’d activated his quirk to shut the TV off. Katsuki didn’t react.

Fuck.

“Katsuki?” He tried, taking a step closer to the teenager on the couch in front of him. Nothing. Like he wasn’t even there. Another step closer, he was within arm’s reach now.

“Katsuki? Can you hear me at all?” Nothing. Half a step forward and then he was kneeling down to be at eye level. Those eyes couldn’t see him.

Contact was a bad idea, but Tsunagu could see burns forming on Katsuki’s upper arms under his palms. For a moment, he almost reached for his quirk.

Then the image of a boy being swallowed by blackness was at the forefront of his mind and he thought better of it. He hadn’t seen it himself, but he heard about it. Worst came to worst he could restrain him with his quirk, but he really didn’t want it to come to that.

“Katsuki, I need to know if you can hear me at all. You’re okay. They can’t hurt you. I’m here. I won’t let them near you, I promise. Can you hear me?”

The only result was Katsuki’s breathing speeding up. The smoke at his sides grew. Tsunagu was out of ideas, so he acted on instinct instead.

Softly Tsunagu started singing. He couldn’t tell you what song it was. It might have been a mash of random words for all he knew. But he kept his voice steady and his tone soft. A few seconds ticked passed with no change, and he braced himself to make contact and pull Katsuki’s hands away from his arms. Still, he kept singing.

It took a few more seconds, but Katsuki blinked. It was the most reaction he'd gotten from the boy since he'd entered the apartment. So Tsunagu kept at it, and ever so slowly, the smoke started to fade away from his sides. Just as slowly, Katsuki's breathing began to slow down. Another blink. A finger twitched.

After what felt like ages, Katsuki's eyes finally seemed to start to move again. Tsunagu was expecting tears, but even as the teenager blinked in confusion, there was that same blank look to them. He let the song trail off. Silence fell over them for a few moments before he spoke again.

"Katsuki? Can you hear me now?"

Red eyes blinked a few times before managing to focus in on the face in front of them. It took a few seconds after that, but finally Katsuki nodded.

"Can you speak at all?"

Seconds ticked by, his mouth opened and then closed again. A shake of the head.

"Okay. That's okay. Is it okay for me to touch you?"

That was considered for longer. Red eyes focusing a little more, as if really taking him in. Still, Katsuki's head inclined ever so slightly.

Tsunagu kept his movements as slow as possible, inching his hands forward and making sure Katsuki could see everything he was doing. His muscles tensed again, but Katsuki didn't pull away. It took ages, but finally Tsunagu was able to carefully lay his hands on top of Katsuki's. The other's iron grip loosened, and the teenager allowed them to be pulled forward.

Underneath the skin was burned and marred. It wasn't pretty, but at the very least it didn't appear to be life threatening. Katsuki was at least somewhat immune to his own explosions after all, something Tsunagu was very grateful for.

He cradled Katsuki's hands in his own, rubbing them gently while being careful to only touch the backs.

“I don’t know what happened with that report, but we’re going to take care of whatever it is. You’re here. You’re okay. You’re alive. That’s all that matters.”

It wasn’t enough so he repeated it. Again and again. Hoping he could somehow make the words more than they were. At some point he shifted up onto the couch, pulling Katsuki into a very careful hug. The other stayed limp.

“Will you be okay if I leave for a second to get medical supplies?”

A nod. He was only gone for a minute to get the kit from the kitchen. Katsuki didn’t move at all while he was gone. The other stayed still and silent while Tsunagu carefully cleaned and bandaged his arms. It was only after Tsunagu had wrapped Katsuki up in another hug that the boy finally spoke. His voice was barely there.

“I-I’m sorry.”

Weak arms lifted and wrapped themselves around Tsunagu. Clinging onto him as if he were drowning. His voice kept spilling out, growing more shaky and desperate.

“I-I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I didn’t-. I tried to get away. I-I tried, I swear. I didn’t- I didn’t mean for this to h-happen. I-I didn’t m-mean for a-anyone to get h-hurt f-for me. I t-tried to fight. I-I’m s-sorry!”

Tsunagu’s own arms pulled Katsuki tightly into a hug, his hands shaking with rage he was only barely suppressing. How fucking dare they. It took everything he had to push down his rage and focus himself on the child in his arms. Katsuki needed him here. One of his hands moved up to carefully brush through Katsuki’s hair. Words found him again.

“No, no, no. Katsuki. Don’t listen to them. It wasn’t your fault. It never was. It never will be. We were all doing our jobs.”

His voice was soft, a murmur at most. It was enough to quiet the stream of apologise from Katsuki at the very least. This needed to get through.

"It wasn't your job to fight them. You're still so young, it shouldn't have ever been your responsibility to fight them off. It was never a fair fight, but you fought as hard as hell anyways. You kept your classmates safe and you kept yourself safe and that's more than anyone could ask of you."

The child in his arms shook with dry sobs. Tears unwilling to come but fighting so hard to get out.

"It wasn't your fault. I know you tried so hard. You did so much. It wasn't your fault."

Those words became a mantra. Repeated like a prayer begging for Katsuki to believe them. Again and again. No matter how long it took, Tsunagu would get it through to him. He needed him to understand that it wasn't his fault.

Finally the sobs subsided. Katsuki was still shaking.

"S-she was on the news. Talkin' to 'em. Crying. Said I was bad. Said she loved me anyways. Said they were going to make me a weapon. 'Cause it was all I-I was good for. Hurting people. Breaking things."

Tsunagu kept his breathing under control, taking long deep breaths. Whether or not the boy realized it, Katsuki was trying to match him. The only thing keeping Tsunagu steady was knowing that he needed to stay calm for the teenager in his arms.

"Well then, it seems you did not get your honesty from her. She's making things up to try and discredit you and discredit anyone trying to help you. At best, she is a liar and a fool who thinks she can scare us into giving you up. I promise we'll set the record straight. Don't let her words get to you."

Silence followed. There was something more there still. Those arms tightened around him, holding on as if he were about to fade away.

"Y-You almost died. There w-was footage. A-All-Might had to r-retire. It-It wouldn't have h-happened if-"

That was all Tsunagu could take. He leaned back, moving one hand to tilt Katsuki's face up towards his own. Red eyes refused to meet his, shame burning on his face.

“Katsuki, I need you to listen to me. Yes, I was injured. Yes, I could’ve died. And even if I had, I would have died proud to have been doing my job. I would have been proud to die to protect my allies, and I would have been proud to die to help rescue you. That is our job as heroes. We all made the choice that day to do our jobs, and you cannot take the blame for our choices.”

He paused to let that sink in, but he could tell Katsuki wasn’t hearing him. So he tried a different approach.

“Do you think it would be better if All for One were free?”

Now that got a response; instantly Katsuki’s face furrowed and finally his eyes looked up.

“Of course not!”

The indignation made him smile, there was that fire again.

“If you hadn’t been kidnapped, we wouldn’t have caught him. Yes, All-Might is now retiring, but the world’s most dangerous villain has also been put behind bars. If anything that happened that day was a result of your actions, it is the fact we were able to subdue a villain who has evaded justice for decades. You had no choice in being kidnapped, but you had choices in how you reacted that you made well. You rejected the villains and fought back against them, allowing All-Might to focus on his own fight. The moment you had the chance, you escaped the situation to allow All-Might to fight at full power. Because you did, he was able to take down All for One and force the other villains to retreat. Do not blame yourself for other people’s choices. Take pride in your own, and know the world is a better place because of them. Am I understood?”

It took a moment, but eventually he was given a shaky nod. Katsuki was not entirely convinced, but it was a start. Sometimes that’s all you could ask for. The silence was back now, but it wasn’t a bad silence anymore. Time ticked by slowly as he moved back to combing his fingers through soft blond hair and allowed the boy to cling to him tightly. He let himself focus on this. Focus on breathing and reassuring the child in his arms that he was still here. He wasn’t going anywhere.

A buzz sounded and broke the silence. Tsunagu glanced at his phone and weighed the pros and cons of ignoring it. In the end Katsuki made the choice for him, releasing his grip and pulling back to rub at his new bandages. So Tsunagu gave Katsuki’s hair one last ruffle, squeezed him gently and let him go to grab his phone.

Aizawa's name popping up on the call screen was unsurprising. This was going to be a long phone call. He glanced back at Katsuki, unsure now. Leaving the teenager alone seemed like a bad idea, but he also didn't trust himself to keep his cool during this call. Katsuki didn't need his anger right now, it'd only encourage him to blame himself.

"It's okay, go answer it in the other room. I'll be fine."

"Ar-"

"I'm sure. I turned my phone off at the start of All-Might's broadcast and I'm sure everyone's panicking by now. I'll just focus on telling 'em to chill the fuck out. Go answer it."

Tsunagu felt like he should say more, but he only had a few seconds left to answer. So instead he nodded and gave Katsuki a smile that was weakly returned and started towards his bedroom. As he walked, he pressed the green button to accept the call. It connected just as he closed the door to the bedroom and he put the phone to his ear. Already his demeanor had shifted, eyes now dangerously thin, tone deadly sharp.

"He watched it. He watched all of it. I got home just as the reporter was wrapping up. I am two seconds away from heading back to that household to teach her the meaning of pain, so I hope like hell you have a plan."

"Don't worry, we do."

Aizawa's tone was deadly as his own and it was the sweetest thing he'd heard in a long time.

Chapter End Notes

:)

I'm Not Ready

Chapter Notes

We've been hanging out in Tsunagu's mind for quite awhile now? Let's tag over to Katsuki and see how he's doing.

[Recommended](#) //
[Listening](#)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It had been one hell of a week.

Somehow, as he sat on the couch of his... former mentor? Future guardian? Protector? Labels aside, as he sat on a couch, all Katsuki could think was that this might just be the worst week of his life. At sixteen. Fuck.

So many fundamental parts of his life had changed so quickly. Everything that he'd thought he'd known, thought were constants, thought he couldn't change, was now flipped upside down. At some point there had been so many emotions flooding through him, changing so quickly, building up and breaking down, flipping on a whim, that it was like he'd lost his ability to even understand them. There were too many and now all he was left with was this weird numbness. Too much had happened. Too much had changed. Too much had hurt, leaving him raw and wounded. Everything had been too much, was still too much. He couldn't handle it all and it was going to overtake him again and-

Okay.

Breathe.

Start from the beginning.

The training camp had been attacked. Because of him. Or, well, at least by villains trying to get to him. He'd fought with everything he had, but it hadn't been enough. At the very least all of his classmates had made it out alive. Fumikage hadn't been taken as well. That was good.

But he hadn't been so lucky. All he'd been able to do was try to keep Izuku from following him. Turns out the fucker hadn't listened. When did he though?

So then he'd been kidnapped. He'd blacked out for a moment and when he'd woke up, he was in fucking restraints again. At this point he'd started to get used to the feeling of them. After 24 hours sitting there bound, unable to speak, unable to sleep, unable to do anything else but think about all the ways he'd fucked up and could've avoided it. No sense in thinking about that now.

Breathe.

The villains had kidnapped him because they thought he would join them. Clearly, they were really dumb. Aizawa had said so himself, and he didn't tell lies to make people feel better. Plus the fuckers had taken the restraints off him before asking him. Total fucking idiots. So he'd fought back. He hadn't been some fucking pussy and faked it to escape or some asshole and signed up with them. He'd stood his fucking ground and fought back because no stupid-ass villains would make a liar out of him.

All-Might had come to help save him then. Katsuki like to think that he must've looked pretty damn fierce, already out of his restraints and having started to blow things up.

Then the goop.

Again.

He could still feel it grabbing at his lungs. Covering his mouth. Running over every part of his flesh. It was the same was when he was fourteen. He couldn't escape it and it was still on him and-

Breathe.

Okay, the goop hadn't been fun, but he'd survived. He'd fought off six fucking villains and escaped. That was pretty badass. His classmates had come for him too. Stupid fucking Izuku, refusing to leave him behind. Stupid Eijirou too, reaching out for him. All of them, stupid for risking their necks like that.

It was still hard for him to grasp. That they cared about him that much. To do something like that. To try and save him.

So he had escaped. He'd escaped the villains and watched All-Might die. Leaving behind a shell of the man he was. All because he hadn't been strong enough. All-Might had died because he hadn't been enough, and now the world knew that. It was his fault, and they-

Breathe.

All-Might had died, but his teacher had lived. The man who became All-Might had lived. All for One was defeated, and now he was in jail. They'd caught three other villains too. He'd helped with one. Two? Maybe. Nobody else had died.

After all that, he'd been brought to the hospital. Somehow he hadn't been badly hurt during all of this, but he'd had enough bumps and scrapes that they wanted to be sure. By that point he'd been too fucking tired to care. They'd put him in the same room as someone else injured from the fight. When he'd finally woken up, Tsunagu had been there. His parents hadn't cared enough to come get him from the hospital room.

That was probably a lie actually. If Katsuki knew his parents then his dad must've been the one to answer the phone. His dad must've known what kind of mood his mom was in and was trying to keep him away. Just until she'd calmed down.

Regardless, they hadn't been there. Tsunagu had been though. Because he'd been hurt. Because he'd almost died by All for One's hands. Because he'd almost died to help save Katsuki, and if he had it would have been for some kid who yelled and talked back and who couldn't even handle some kids making fun of him. He would've wasted his life on-

Breathe.

Tsunagu had been there. He'd offered to help Katsuki get home, even after he'd already done so much. Because.... Because he didn't leave his job half finished. It had been what Katsuki had admired about him most. No excuses, a hero does what needs to be done. Even before villains, internships, and kidnappings had been a part of his life it had inspired him.

He'd helped Katsuki get home, and that should've been the end of it. But then of course his mom was in a bad mood. Of course she didn't care his former mentor was there. Why the fuck would she? She'd hit him in front of teachers before. None of them ever cared. Usually he could take it, but god that night, everything had already hurt so much and he could still feel the goop on him. He'd just wanted to curl up in his bed and pretend everything was okay, but she was there instead.

Reminding him of how *weak* he was. Reminding him of how fucking stupid he was for getting caught. Reminding him of how much of a fuck up he was, that nobody should've wasted their time trying to save him, that he should just go di-

Breathe.

It was something he'd been through a thousand times before. Only this time something had changed. Tsunagu had stopped her.

Nobody had ever stopped her before. Not his teachers. Not his father. Not even himself.

But Tsunagu had. He had stopped her and then he'd made up a lie and given Katsuki a way out. Nobody had ever given him a way out before.

It was like Eijirou's hand reaching for him all over again. Calling out to him. Offering him an escape.

So he'd taken it. Expecting it to be just for the night, just long enough for him to be able to face her again.

And then morning had come, and he'd been offered that hand again. Only this time it wasn't just a temporary escape, it was a real way out. A way out of the hell he'd been living in for the past sixteen years.

He took that hand. It was terrifying, but he didn't want to stay anymore. Everyday he saw parallels between himself and her. He could taste her words on his tongue, could feel her in the back of his skull, poisoning him. If he stayed, if he refused that hand, he'd become her. That was scarier than asking for help. That was worth his pride, his carefully built image, his strength. It was worth anything not to become her.

Writing everything down had been the hardest and most relieving thing he'd done in his life. Guilt had crushed him with every stroke of his pen, but at the same time it felt so good to not hide it anymore. He'd never lied about it directly. Nobody had ever asked the right questions. It had still felt like he was spilling dirty secrets. Like he was marking himself as damaged.

Maybe he was damaged.

Scratch that, he definitely was damaged. He was bruised and bent. But he wasn't broken. Katsuki was damaged, but he could patch himself up. He would get better.

Tsunagu had promised to help him get better too. He had been there when nobody else had, he had offered a hand, an escape, and afterwards he'd offered more than that. More than a way out, a place to go to. Offered him a choice again, when so few people in Katsuki's life did. Even after everything.

It didn't make sense. Katsuki really believed that Tsunagu wanted to help him get better. He wanted to help Katsuki become a better person, and he believed that Katsuki could be one. But Katsuki didn't understand why. Maybe that was okay. Maybe he wasn't meant to understand it. Maybe he'd figure it out one day.

Breathe.

When they'd gone to his house. His former house? Either way, when they'd gone there, Katsuki had known his mom wasn't going to sign the papers. She never gave up without a fight. He'd already accepted that. But he'd forgotten how much she hated him having any control. How much she hated when he made his own choices and didn't do what she said. Fuck, he should've known better.

The TV had just been to distract him, to take his mind off the incoming phone call from Auntie Inko who was going to be crying and upset and make Katsuki feel so fucking guilty. She always did, even when she didn't mean to.

Then All-Might had come on. He'd turned off his phone.

It made sense. Him retiring. It made sense but it still hurt. The speech had been good though, and even though guilt had been coursing through his veins, if that had been it, he would've been okay. Upset but okay.

She had come on next. It hadn't even taken her half an hour from when she'd found out to find her way onto TV. The reporter was so nice to her, Katsuki was pretty sure that the anchor had gone to school with his mom. She'd cried. He'd never seen her cry before. Yet there she was on national TV, crying as she declared him violent. As she talked about the struggles of trying to raise him. About how she had tried so hard to help him, and now they were stealing her precious son away. Making up lies to turn him into a weapon. Suggesting that he'd gone with the villains on purpose,

even as he could still feel that hand on his neck.

If they hadn't shown the clip, he wouldn't have broken.

It was so short. Fit in among other scenes of the battle. Best Jeanist taking a shot from All for One's air cannon. Tsunagu on the ground, bleeding out. Close to death. Because of Katsuki.

Everything was too much. Guilt, fear, anger, shame, everything. It overwhelmed him and he couldn't do anything. Couldn't hear, couldn't speak, couldn't breathe. It was too fucking much.

Then there had been soft notes. Lyrics to a song he couldn't understand. Might not have been a song at all.

Neither of his parents had sung to him before. But Tsunagu had. He'd sung and waited and listened and cared. Even though Katsuki had almost gotten him killed. Somehow, he was still there. Somehow, he still cared.

And now Katsuki was here. Bandages on his arms from wounds he'd inflicted. Holding a powered off phone in his hands. Still breathing.

Fucking take that life.

Chapter End Notes

Next up, some long overdue conversations.

Edit:

I love you all for being concerned about me, but don't worry about my update schedule. I had 30k of this stuff written before I even started posting, and I still have about a 10k buffer of stuff that just needs minor editing. I promise I am taking care of myself and not pushing too hard on the writing.

<3

Class 1-A Fucking Cares

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Katsuki didn't know what emotion he was supposed to be feeling right now. He didn't know what emotions he was feeling. Or if he was feeling any at all.

What he did know was that if he didn't answer his phone soon, his classmates were going to pull some stupid shit. So he turned it on. Watching it flicker through its start up sequence. It had been awhile since he'd seen the logos go past. Such a silly thing to think about, but he'd always been careful to keep his phone charged. He'd never turned it off before either, just to silent.

He'd missed 10 phone calls and there were a couple dozen texts waiting for him.

About half he disregarded. They were either old messages telling him not to watch the news broadcast, or they were from relatives he didn't care about asking how he could do such a thing.

It took a moment to decide, but in the end he clicked on class 1-A's group chat first.

Uraraka: Even though it's sad All-Might is retiring, he gave a great last speech!

Asui: Yeah! He really did, and it means he'll probably be spending more time teaching!

Asui: So we'll get to see him at school a lot more!

Yaoyorozu: That's the spirit! we are sad to see All-Might leave the heroics stage, but we will all be working hard to make him proud.

Jiro: Not to interrupt the positive vibes, but uh, are any of you watching Channel 5 right now?

Ashido: No. Why? Should we be?

Jiro: Yeah, I think everyone should tune in.

Jiro: It looks like it's something about Bakugou?

Kaminari: Wait, what does that mean?

Sero: He okay?

Yaoyorozu: I'm tuning in now

Yaoyorozu: Is

Yaoyorozu: Is that his mother?

Iida: Is everything okay?

Iida: I'm not near a TV right now, but if it's urgent I can get to one.

Uraraka: Uhhh

Uraraka: Idk what is going on here?

Ashido: She's saying Blasty's been taken into protective custody by pro-heros and they won't let him see his family?

Ashido: And they've filed a case to try and take custody completely, but there's been no statement on why.

Kaminari: Hang on, what's happening here?

Kaminari: They're saying that Best Jeanist filed for custody of him

Kaminari: Or like, U.A. filed on behalf of Best Jeanist for custody of him??

Sero: Didn't they super not get along when he did his internship?

Sero: Why would he do that?

Ashido: Wait, she's still talking about stuff.

Ashido: Okay what the fuck.

Ashido: I don't even know where she's going with this but I think she's trying to claim the hero commission wants to make him a weapon?

Iida: I'm making my way to a TV now. Please keep me updated.

Yaoyorozu: Bakugou's mother has started....

Yaoyorozu: Making claims that he is violent and uncontrollable

Yaoyorozu: They seem entirely false to me, and I'm now confused as to her motivations.

Ashido: I'm sorry but this bitch is trying to imply he went with the villains willingly!

Ashido: Did she miss the part where he was trying to blow them up and escaped?!

Todoroki: I am only just catching up on all of this myself

Todoroki: But I can personally attest that Bakugou did not go with them willingly.

Todoroki: He was quite literally dragged through their portal by his neck.

Uraraka: Of course he didn't go with them willingly!

Uraraka: Who would be dumb enough to believe something like that.

Kaminari: Hang on, Bakugou's not seeing this shit, is he?

Ashido: I don't know! He's not answering his phone.

Iida: When was the last time someone had contact with him?

Kirishima: I spoke to him like an hour ago, not long before the All-Might broadcast

Kirishima: He said he was okay, that some stuff was going down, but that he'd catch me up on it later.

Kirishima: Holy shit though I didn't think it was anything like this.

Kirishima: He's not answering me either.

Kirishima: I don't know what to do, he's never not answered before.

Todoroki: Has anyone heard from Midoriya?

Tokoyami: I have not, however, I can also say I've heard from Bakugou today.

Tokoyami: I thanked him for helping me control Dark Shadow and apologized for not being able to save him in return.

Tokoyami: He told me I was being dumb and that he was fine.

Sero: Yeah, that sounds like him alright.

Todoroki: Midoriya is also not answering his phone. It appears both of them have turned their phones off.

Todoroki: Does anyone know where Bakugou is right now?

Kirishima: I actually asked him if I could come by yesterday and see how he was doing, but he said he wasn't at home.

Kirishima: Midoriya told me he'd heard from his mom that he'd been moved to a secondary location for safety.

Kirishima: But Katsuki said that I'd be able to come visit at some point.

Kirishima: Never said where he was though.

Jiro: Well I dunno where he is right now, but given how his mom is talking about him, I'm really damn glad he's not there.

Ashido: Agreed!

Ashido: I cannot believe this asshole of a reporter is just letting her talk about him like that!

Uraraka: I'm sorry but did that bitch just use our fight at the sports festival as an example of how violent he is???

Uraraka: "oh look he beat up some poor helpless girl"

Uraraka: I'm a fucking hero in training too!

Uraraka: I wasn't helpless then and I'm not helpless now

Uraraka: He gave me a damn good fight and didn't go easy on me just because I was a girl and it's one of the things I respect him for!

Uraraka: Is there some way I can call in and tell them to piss off?

Yaoyorozu: I'm attempting to find contact information for this station, but unfortunately, I'm not having any luck.

It went on like that for awhile. Katsuki found himself grinning just the slightest bit as he scrolled through the adventure of his classmates trying to figure out how to contact the station and tell them to fuck off with their accusations. In the end, it appeared that Aizawa had sent out a mass text telling all of them that they weren't allowed to talk to any media about the situation and that it was being handled. Which brought him to the most recent set of messages.

Midoriya: Hey guys!

Ashido: Dude! Where the fuck have you been? Have you seen what's been on TV?

Midoriya: Yes, I have. I've been busy with something related to that.

Kirishima: Any chance Katsuki talked to you? Do you know where he is or if he's okay?

Midoriya: Well, uh

Midoriya: I'll be honest, I'm not supposed to know where he is, but I'm pretty sure I do.

Midoriya: We haven't talked since the broadcast happened, he's not answering my messages either.

Midoriya: I think he turned his phone off.

Midoriya: But I do know that someone is with him who can help him a lot more than any of us can.

Kaminari: Do you know what the fuck is wrong with his mom?

Kaminari: Why would she do something like this?

Midoriya: It's... not really my place to say anything?

Midoriya: Sorry guys, I know that's not the answer you want, but Kacchan really values his privacy.

Midoriya: As I'm sure you can guess, she's not a good parent.

Midoriya: But anything more than isn't something I can share.

Midoriya: That'll be up to him and what he feels comfortable telling people about.

Sero: Any chance you know why Best Jeanist of all people is filing for custody of him?

Sero: Like, I get you don't wanna share all his secrets, that's cool.

Sero: But I'm just confused as to how that happened?

Midoriya: Ah!

Midoriya: Um

Midoriya: Sorry, hang on

Midoriya: Lemme check something

Midoriya: Okay, so this I think I'm good to tell you about since Kacchan told me earlier I could if anyone asked.

Midoriya: Best Jeanist was at the hospital that we dropped Kacchan off at.

Midoriya: Both of them recovered at about the same time, but Kacchan couldn't leave without an escort and nobody was free until morning

Midoriya: So Jeanist offered to take him home, but along the way, decided protective custody was a better idea.

Kirishima: Well I guess that'd make some sense.

Kirishima: There's probably some stuff there we don't know.

Kaminari: I'm just hoping he's okay.

Kaminari: I mean, if my parent went on TV and said stuff like that about me after I got kidnapped, it'd fuck me up really bad.

Iida: While I agree, we must trust that the pro-heros and our teachers are working to handle the situation appropriately.

Iida: I'm sure Bakugou will be back in here in no time to let us all know he's okay!

Jiro: I hope so

Jiro: Maybe in the meantime though, I mean, given all the shit that's going on

Jiro: We should switch to calling him Katsuki?

Jiro: I mean some of us already do

Jiro: But I feel mega-weird about calling him Bakugou given everything else.

Tokoyami: I have to agree, the name feels uncomfortable now.

Tokoyami: Katsuki has always sounded far more pleasant to me anyways.

Yaoyorozu: I think it wouldn't be a bad idea

Yaoyorozu: If he decides he would like to be still be called Bakugou, or would like to go by a different name, then I'm sure he'll have no issue letting us know.

Yaoyorozu: But for right now, Katsuki seems more suitable.

Asui: It's way cuter anyways.

Ashido: Agreed! Though personally I'm going to stick with calling him Blasty.

Huh. It was weird that Katsuki hadn't really considered the name thing before now. He'd always thought of himself as Katsuki before, and even though he'd responded to Bakugou, it'd never really been his name. It wasn't something he minded being called, if anything, he'd preferred the distance from others. But now... Katsuki felt more right. He'd stick with it for now, and maybe in the future decide if he wanted to be someone else.

For right now though, he needed to reassure his idiots. Before he did so though, he tapped up and changed his username in the chat. It was quick enough to do, but somehow it made him feel more in control. He had a handle on this. He could do this. Nothing was wrong.

Katsuki: I'm fine fuckers.

Katsuki: Just needed some time to process shit.

Kaminari: Dude! You're alive!!

Kaminari: You had us all worried!

Uraraka: Just so you know, absolutely none of us bought her bullshit.

Uraraka: She's a liar and we know you didn't go willingly, and I dunno what she's trying to pull, but anyone who believes her is dumb as hell!

Ashido: Seconded!

Ashido: I swear I'll go fight her if you give me the word!

Ashido: Nobody gets to talk shit about my friends, I don't care who she thinks she is!

Katsuki: Fuck off with that, I don't need you fighting my battles for me.

Katsuki: Besides, she's only doing this because she's already losing.

Katsuki: This was just her way of lashing out at me the only way she could.

Katsuki: Just ignore her shit.

Jiro: Listen, I know you aren't really one for talking things out

Jiro: But like, you know we're all here for you, right?

Jiro: None of us are going to think less of you or anything, we're not dumb.

Iida: Yes! Although all of us are more than happy to aid you, I can promise that none of us are foolish enough to think you weak for it.

Iida: Every hero needs help from others from time to time. There's no weakness in that.

Tokoyami: I can concur.

Tokoyami: Although I can personally attest to your ability to fight the darkness alone, I would also be more than happy to stand by your side through it, as you have done for me.

Yaoyorozu: All of us would be happy to listen without judgement

Yaoyorozu: I can only imagine what you must be going through right now, and I can't say I have any good advice to offer

Yaoyorozu: But any of us can still listen and help however we can.

Pretending his eyes weren't blurring was getting harder and harder. Katsuki quickly rubbed at them to clear his vision. A voice in the back of his head screamed to lash out, to make sure none of them thought he was weak, to keep them away where it was safe. It was overwhelming, and he almost listening to it since he wasn't used to dealing with this many emotions at once. Wasn't used to dealing with people offering help. Didn't know how to talk about any of this.

Instead, he remembered Tsunagu's advice. It only took a second of internal debate to make up his mind.

Katsuki: Thanks, it helps to know you fuckers have my back

Katsuki: Right now everything is being handled.

Katsuki: And at some point I'll probably be able to tell you more,

Katsuki: But right now I'm not ready to talk about this shit yet

Katsuki: It's a whole fucking mess and I need time to sort it out on my own first.

Ashido: Then that's okay too!

Ashido: You don't owe us any explanation, just as long as you're okay, we'll trust you to know what's best for you.

Ashido: If you wanna talk about it at some point, we're happen to listen, but that happens on your terms when you're ready for it.

Ashido: And if anyone gives you shit over that then I'll help you show them a thing or two about respecting other people's privacy.

Kaminari: Seconded!

Sero: Thirded!

Todoroki: Agreed.

Todoroki: When you're ready, I would also be more than willing to listen or offer support as I can.

Todoroki: But I can understand preferring to handle things quietly.

Todoroki: I think everyone in our class can agree to respect that.

Katsuki: Thanks guys.

Katsuki: I'll be alright, seriously.

Katsuki: Y'all fucking know me, give me a week to get my shit figured out and I'll be back on my feet ready to go twice as hard.

Katsuki: I'm probably going to go quiet for a bit until then. I'll still check in and message back when I can, but I gotta fucking sort this out first.

Katsuki: Don't get yourselves killed while I'm gone.

With that, he exited the main chat. His hands were shaking, but his chest felt lighter than it had in a long time. Like a heavy weight had been taken off it.

It'd never been an option before, to just tell people he wasn't ready to talk about something. Or well, he'd never really known it was an option. Usually he had to spark off and yell to get people to leave him alone. Push and push against them and pray they didn't push back harder.

This felt a lot better. Like things were actually dealt with.

After taking a moment to calm down again, Katsuki flipped over to the first of three text strings he needed to deal with, Izuku's.

Izuku: Kacchan... I

Izuku: I get if you don't want to talk to me

Izuku: But I'm so sorry

Izuku: I'm sorry I didn't realize how bad it was

Izuku: I mean, I still should've said something or done something sooner because I did know it was kinda bad

Izuku: But I didn't realize she was this bad

Izuku: I didn't realize she was still this bad

Izuku: I'm so sorry

Izuku: Are you okay?

Izuku: Please don't listen to her.

Izuku: She's just a liar, I promise.

Izuku: I was there, I'd know.

Izuku: Please answer, are you okay?

Izuku: Aizawa was finishing up getting our statements before the broadcast came on and he had to go.

Izuku: I've never seen him that pissed

Izuku: All-Might wants to talk to you too, he's really upset as well and he wanted me to tell you it wasn't your fault.

Izuku: I'm going to give him your number if it's okay?

Izuku: I'm so sorry Kacchan.

Izuku: I know you aren't violent, you're not bad or uncontrollable or any of that shit.

Izuku: Is Jeanist there with you?

Izuku: I saw him with Aizawa, he seems nice.

Izuku: Are you okay?

Izuku: I'm going to try to not let too much out to the others, I'm really sorry if I talk about something you don't want me to

Izuku: I just don't want them to do something dumb

Katsuki: Stop apologizing

Katsuki: I'm fine nerd

Katsuki: It wasn't your fault.

Izuku: Kacchan!

Izuku: Oh god, I'm glad you're okay, I'm so sorry

Izuku: I knew and I should've said something sooner and

Katsuki: Nope, stop that shit right now

Katsuki: You wanna know who else knew and didn't say shit?

Katsuki: Me

Izuku: That doesn't count!

Katsuki: It counts as much as you do

Katsuki: Actually I count more since I knew how bad it was, I had proof, and I still decided not to say shit.

Izuku: I still should've done something, I should've tried again or talked to the UA teachers because they were different, or done anything but stay quiet.

Katsuki: No, you shouldn't have

Katsuki: How many times do I have to tell you, it's not your fucking job to save me.

Izuku: But

Katsuki: No, shut up and listen to me for once.

Katsuki: I kept shit from you and everyone else on purpose.

Katsuki: It was my fucking choice

Katsuki: It was a dumbass choice, but it was still mine and not yours

Katsuki: You speaking up again wouldn't have changed shit because I would've kept hiding it, and I'm fucking good at hiding things went I want to.

Katsuki: Besides, like I said, it's not your job to save me.

Katsuki: 'Zuku you've got to stop it with this fucking martyr complex.

Katsuki: You can't take the blame for anything bad that happens in my life.

Katsuki: We were just fucking kids.

Katsuki: She's at fault for what she did.

Katsuki: My dad's at fault for never stopping her

Katsuki: Our middle school teachers are at fault for never asking questions and for handling things like shit the one time they got a fucking hint something was up.

Katsuki: But you were a kid, it wasn't your job to save me.

Katsuki: It's still not your fucking job to save me.

Katsuki: Particularly not after all the shit I put you through.

Izuku: I forgave you for that.

Izuku: I know you were just repeating what she was doing.

Izuku: I know you were scared and lashing out because you didn't know better.

Katsuki: Okay first of all fucker, I haven't even apologized yet so don't you dare fucking forgive me.

Katsuki: I'm not doing that shit over text either.

Katsuki: And let me be very fucking clear about something

Katsuki: Yes, she treated me like shit, I'm starting to figure that out now.

Katsuki: But that doesn't magically make the shit I did to you okay.

Katsuki: I told you to kill yourself, god, what if you had fucking listened to me?

Izuku: I mean yeah, okay, fine, you did that

Izuku: But you also watched me like a hawk for the next month and looked like you were going to have a heart attack every time I went near stairs.

Izuku: Don't think I didn't notice how any time I was off ground level you were following me

Izuku: I knew you didn't mean it, and I'd heard her shouting something pretty similar at you before.

Izuku: I dunno, didn't hurt as much knowing it was just you repeating things she'd said

Izuku: Your actions have always spoken louder than your words anyways.

Izuku: Maybe right now isn't the time to talk about this though.

Izuku: I mean you're right, we need to talk about this face to face

Izuku: But I think you've got enough going on.

Katsuki: Yeah, I'll be fucking honest, I don't have the energy for this right now.

Katsuki: Just

Katsuki: Don't blame yourself for this shit okay?

Katsuki: It just makes me feel worse, and I can't handle trying to comfort you and sorting out my own problems right now.

Izuku: Okay Kacchan

Izuku: I won't, I promise.

Izuku: I'll talk to my mom too.

Katsuki: Thanks nerd.

Katsuki: I'll be okay, I promise 'Zuku.

Katsuki: You just gotta trust me on that.

Izuku: Always, Kacchan.

Chapter End Notes

They'll sort their shit out eventually. It's not gonna be easy, but they'll get there.
They're both too stubborn not to.

Next Steps

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Now that Izuku was sorted, Katsuki had two conversations left. Aizawa had messaged him just after he'd sent out the mass text. Although, Aizawa was probably also on the phone with Tsunagu now. That just left Eijirou. Who had messaged him privately since he'd handled things in the chat.

He could do this.

Eijirou: Hey

Eijirou: I know you said in the main chat you weren't ready to talk about all this

Eijirou: But like, is there anything I could do?

Eijirou: I dunno where you're at right now, but is there a chance I could visit so we can chill together?

Katsuki: Not sure

Katsuki: I asked earlier and it was possible but that was before the media shit storm hit

Katsuki: Like I said before, everything's a fucking mess right now

Katsuki: Court date is in two days though, so once that's over with it should all cool off.

Eijirou: Are we allowed to show up to that?

Eijirou: Media keeps saying something about it being sealed, but I'll be honest, I dunno what that means or what the rules are.

Katsuki: I've been looking shit up on my phone, but as best I can tell it means they can pick and choose whose allowed in.

Katsuki: I'll ask if I can have anyone else there.

Katsuki: Not the whole class for fucking sure, because I don't want to deal with that shit, but maybe you and a few others

Eijirou: Okay, just let me know?

Eijirou: My moms are also down to get me wherever, whenever

Katsuki: I will as soon as I do, promise

Eijirou: Alright

Eijirou: I'm glad you're okay man

Eijirou: I may not understand what's going on exactly, or what you're going through right now, but I'm with you through whatever the hell it is.

Eijirou: No matter what

Katsuki: I know you are.

Katsuki: Thanks Ei'

Katsuki: For this, and for coming after me before.

Eijirou: Of course man!!!

Eijirou: That's what friends do.

It was easier than he thought it'd be. He'd forgotten how easy things were with Eijirou. That was how they'd become friends in the first place, Eijirou had always been strong enough to push back on him while never pushing too far. Most people took energy to be around, pushed at his buttons, made him tense. Eijirou made him calmer, made him feel relaxed. Even just texting him had left a slight grin on his face as he felt the weight on his shoulders leave a little more.

Tsunagu was still in the other room. That meant Aizawa was probably still planning stuff, so that conversation could be left alone for now.

What now?

Katsuki's eyes drifted around the living room. Turning on the TV again was a solid no-go. If he was hungry then cooking would've been an option, but he felt like even looking at food right now might make him sick. Wait.

His eyes fell on the bag resting on the floor.

Oh right, his stuff.

Smoothly he stretched out from the couch so he could grab the bag to pull it over to him. From there it was a simple matter of unzipping it, and there were his things. Or at least some of them. Most of what he needed had been in his backpack, he brought almost everything vital to training camp. But for space reasons he'd left behind two of his textbooks, both of which he'd need his worksheets. Beyond that, his laptop had been the most important thing that he hadn't trusted his mom not to go after. It also had school work saved onto it, as well as a handful of precious files buried deep in its hard drive. It looked like Tsunagu had also grabbed some of his clothing. His spare uniform and his favorite skull t-shirt were both there. Honestly, he hadn't even thought about clothing for the list, but it was nice knowing that those were safe too.

Then there were the boxes.

He paused, straining his hearing to listen for Tsunagu. The other was still in the other room talking on his phone. Not that Katsuki really needed to hide the contents of the boxes from him, but habit dictated nobody else knew what was in the boxes.

In total he had three. The first one was red and he picked it up carefully. Turning it over he keyed in the code, 12 digits in total. It clicked open. Inside was his art supplies. Really it wasn't much. A few sketches books, three filled up and one halfway used. Some pens, some pencils (colored and graphite), a few other little tools he'd picked up. Just the sight of it relaxed him, bringing back fond memories.

Drawing was something he had enjoyed since he was young. Putting down ideas onto a paper, taking something out of his mind and making it real, it was nice. For long stretches of his life, his artwork was one of the few places he had total control. He never wasted space, every sketchbook page was filled corner to corner with fractals, scenes, doodles, moments from his life, moments from his dreams. Pages were covered front and back, all his work done lightly enough to not bleed through. Versions of his hero costume were scattered throughout the books, developing and changing over time. Schematics for his bracers were the most recent addition, along with flight strategies and ideas for new moves. Every one of his drawings were preserved in these pages, save for the very few given to Auntie Inko.

Or well, every drawing since the first sketchbook.

She'd burned the first one. He'd lost almost all his early artwork when she did.

Katsuki had learned to hide his things after that.

The half-filled sketchbook drew his eye, but not today. This wasn't a space he felt safe drawing in yet. Maybe someday. For today, he closed the lid to the box again, tucked it back into the bag, and went to pick up the second box.

A door opened and instinct made him push the box to the bottom of the bag instead. He straightened up quickly, eyes darting to the hallway. Footsteps. It took a lot to keep his breathing from speeding up. She wasn't here. She wasn't coming. Still, anxiety built in his core, grasping at his throat and pulling at his limbs. Tsunagu only took a few seconds to round the corner, but it felt like eons.

Hiding his sudden relief was almost harder than hiding his fear. It wasn't clear if Tsunagu bought it or not.

Red eyes were fixed on the man now. Waiting. He couldn't speak. Thankfully, Tsunagu still could.

"I've spoken with Aizawa and we have two plans."

A tilt of his head to show he was listening was about all Katsuki could manage. It was enough.

"U.A. and my office are releasing official statements now, but that's not going to be enough to quell this. So, we've arranged a series of interviews tomorrow morning. Everyone who participated in the rescue will be giving at least a short interview on the experience, which really needed to happen anyways. I will also be giving an interview, and in it I will be addressing your situation more directly."

All straightforward and to be expected. Something was hinging on him here though. There wouldn't be two plans if there wasn't.

"There are two options for after my interview. The first is that the program ends after that. I can answer enough to keep people off the case, but, there may still be doubt. Option two is entirely dependent on your mental state. If you think you could do it, a solo interview from you would go a long way in changing the narrative being presented. You would do the first 50 minutes of it alone, and I would join you for the last 10. Again though, this would only be if you feel completely comfortable with the idea. It could also be adjusted if you'd prefer I'd be there the entire time or—"

“I want to do it.”

He didn’t even need to think about it. Tsunagu seemed surprised at his instant reply, concern clear on his face.

“Are you sure Katsuki?”

“I’m sure. I think-. I know I need to do this. She’s trying to get into my head. Trying to break me and take control again. I want her and everyone else to see I’m not broken. I’m still in control of who I am, no matter what she tries.”

The words were coming out before he could second guess himself. Talking with his friends had given him courage he hadn’t realized he needed. Katsuki was not the person his mother tried to make him. Despite her best efforts, he was not her, and he never would be. She had taken control of him for too long, even now trying to shape how others saw him. Not anymore though. This was his fucking story, his fucking life, his mistakes, his conflicts, his growth. For better or for worse, he was going to make everyone else understand that too. They would see him as he was whether they liked it or not. Whatever judgement they wanted to cast was fine by him, so long as it wasn’t cast through her crooked lens.

Tsunagu regarded him for a long moment before finding whatever he was looking for on Katsuki’s face.

“Alright, I’ll have the brief for what we can and can’t say forwarded to you. We’ll get there about 9 am and it should go until 1 pm or so. After that I have a few things to take care of at my office. Is there anything you need to do afterwards?”

Huh. That would actually work out well then. Eijirou lived fairly close to the office so it wouldn’t be much trouble for him to get there, and the location was already publicly known so there wasn’t concern about compromising it.

“Actually, yeah. Would I be able to have Kirishima meet me at your office? He’s a close friend, he was the one that caught me when I was escaping. I just - I’d like to see him again before the whole court thing.”

God he hated the slight tremble to his words in his throat making it seem like he was nervous. He hated that he was nervous. That was dumb, it was an easy request. It was fine. Even if they

couldn't meet up for some reason, he'd be fine. Glancing down at his hands, Katsuki noticed a slight sheen of sweat and sparked it off smoothly. When he looked back up, Tsunagu had a soft grin on his face.

"Of course he can. I wouldn't mind meeting him myself. He must be an awfully brave young man, to have flown into such a situation in order to save his friend."

That got a snort, something between actual laughter and snark. Though the grin that formed on Katsuki's face was also pretty soft.

"Well he's brave as hell but also a bit of an idiot. A lot of an idiot. Most of my class are idiots actually, but they're my idiots. He's usually my favorite idiot."

"I would've thought Izuku would be your favorite idiot." The comment was lightly teasing. It still stung a little bit, but Katsuki brushed it off. Find the humor instead.

"Izuku gets to be my favorite idiot when he stops breaking his bones every other week. I'm sick of having to take notes for him because he messed up his fingers again."

"Fair enough, Kirishima's quirk would help him avoid breaking bones I suppose. He can harden himself, right?"

"Yeah, he's good at not getting injured. We do well together in fights since I don't have to worry about hurting him with my shit. His personality's the same way."

Tsunagu only hummed thoughtfully in response to that. It was enough for Katsuki, whose mind was now turned to the interview tomorrow. His mind drifted back to the blue box in his bag as he considered his options. After a minute or two, he broke the soft silence.

"I'll let him know he can meet us there then. What do I need to know for tomorrow?"

The bitten lip and slight grimace told him a lot. Still he waited for Tsunagu's reply patiently as the other turned to mess with his phone for a moment. Katsuki's phone pinged. It only took him a moment to open the file, which had a list of questions followed with suggested answers and things to avoid. He started to skim the information as Tsunagu spoke.

“Were it up to me, I would spend the entire time ripping apart every lie she put forth and letting the world know of what a monster she is. However, legally, I cannot give out any information about the case to the public. No pro-hero involved can. Even with your permission. Particularly since the case is still in progress, any of us discussing what happened could put it at risk.”

“But I can talk about it.” Well fuck, that was a fun situation now wasn’t it. Tsunagu gave him a half-smile and a nod.

“You can say as much or as little on the subject as you want to. I’m well aware it is not an easy subject to talk about.”

He’d need to think on what he wanted to do there. Not right now though, right now he scrolled through the questions. As he did so, Tsunagu started to talk again.

“So you’re aware, U.A. has issued a formal apology for the Sports Festival incident. They’re taking the blame for what happened and acknowledging they mishandled the case. However, the subject shouldn’t come up during the interviews tomorrow. As much as I think it ought to be talked about, again we can’t risk the case. Which means tomorrow will be largely focused on recent events.”

Nodding in reply, Katsuki couldn’t help but agree with the choice. In all honesty he’d prefer to not talk about that particular event right now anyways. Somehow it felt rawer than the kidnapping. Weird. His eyes fell on one of the first questions for the last 10 minutes. Hm. Thinking through his options, he lifted his gaze from his phone and looked towards the bag again. Towards that box.

“Anything else I need to know right now? If not, I’m going to unpack.”

A shake of the head was all he needed to take the bag and head to the bedroom he’d been staying in. His bedroom? Maybe. The clothing was tucked away quickly and neatly. The red box went into a drawer on the side table. It felt weird having it so exposed. His laptop was put onto the side table, along with both textbooks.

That just left the blue box. Sitting on his bed as he stared at it and tried to make up his mind.

Too much time passed before he finally keyed in the code for it. Once it was open he was instantly uncomfortable. Exposed and indecent. Still, he sorted through the objects to find what he was

looking for. The treasure was carefully tucked into his backpack for the next day. He still had time to decide if he wanted to go through with it, but it was an option now.

Somehow, Katsuki already knew he was going to go through with it. The question was on the sheet after all, so he'd have to answer it, and Katsuki wasn't a damn liar. Never was, never was going to be. Even if it meant getting a little embarrassed.

Chapter End Notes

You know, I always thought it was an interesting detail that Katsuki's parents both worked in the fashion industry. It seemed oddly specific. Particularly considering who he picked as a mentor.

When Will You Learn?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sometimes, Katsuki hated his quirk.

His mother called him ungrateful whenever he complained about it. Other people had it worse. Denki shorted out all the time. Izuku broke his bones. Tokoyami had a million and one issues with Dark Shadow. Really, he shouldn't be complaining.

But none of that changed the fact he was currently standing in a packed studio with nitroglycerin trying to drip off his fingers and no way of dealing with it. Sparking off was out of the question. Not only were there cameras everywhere that would be trained on him in an instant, but Tsunagu had just gone out to do his own interview, and Katsuki hadn't talked about the issue with anyone else. Aizawa would probably understand, but he'd had to go off somewhere about half an hour ago and hadn't returned. There was also the fact he had been told to wait near hair and makeup. Where apparently the atmosphere was more aerosol than air, and that wasn't even getting to the amount of flammable products they'd put on him already. At the very least he was able to wear his school uniform, and while some products had been put in his hair, it was still close to his usual messy style. Some of it had fallen out of place actually, and it was bothering him. With his fingers coated in nitroglycerin, there wasn't much he could do to fix it.

It almost made Katsuki wish Endeavor hadn't fucked off somewhere. That asshole always had flames on for interviews, and he could've used that to detonate it safely and hide it in the fire. Pass it off as being curious about the flames or something. However, as soon as Endeavor had finished his own interview he'd stomped off elsewhere. Eh. Wasn't really a loss, Katsuki would rather deal with the nitroglycerin than have to look at that fucker any longer than he had to.

All else aside, he had a problem that he needed to take care of, and right now it was looking like washing it off was his only option. It was bad for the environment, leaking toxic chemicals into the waterway and all that. Probably not great for the plumbing either, but it was his only option. Katsuki mumbled to the lady who'd been assigned to him that he was heading to the restroom and went to do just that.

It should've been easy. Life had other fucking plans though.

Or rather, sleazy shithead tabloid reporters had other plans.

They'd been waiting for him. The moment his foot had crossed the doorway into the otherwise empty restroom, he'd felt eyes on him. Already he'd had to wait near the door for someone else to open it for him, since he couldn't risk touching the knob. That had been awkward enough. Then he'd stepped in and felt watched instantly. There wasn't anyone else in the restroom. His gaze fell to the sink, and it hit him that he could spark off safely now. Nobody else was here.

So why did he still feel uncomfortable?

The answer, as it turned out, was two reporters that stepped into the restroom merely thirty seconds after he'd entered. Instantly, Katsuki knew they weren't meant to be there. Nobody who worked at this station would be bringing cameras into the restroom.

There wasn't time for him to escape. He had been too focused on taking care of his hands. They were too aggressive. Before he knew it, his back was pressed up against the far wall. The camera's red light was on. This was being recorded.

Both of them were asking him questions. He couldn't make out what they were asking over sound of blood pounding in his ears. But he needed to stay in control.

"Leave me alone."

Stay calm. Assert yourself. They needed to leave. Why weren't they leaving? Why were they stepping closer? His palms itched and he felt the build up tick at him. Keeping it from igniting took all his concentration.

"Leave me alone!"

This time he put more power behind his words. He needed them to stop. There was too much build up from hours spent near hot lights. Controlling it was going to be beyond him soon. They. Needed. To. Stop.

Katsuki was so focused on trying to control his quirk, that he didn't see the reporter grab for him. He felt the touch though. The hand was on his shoulder. It was on his neck. It was pulling him through the portal. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck, no nonono-

The explosion went off before he could stop it.

It was hardly anything, the heat from it didn't touch either of them. Only startled them into jumping backwards.

That was all they needed. He could hear them now, words ringing in his ears.

"...violently attacked us...clearly still mentally unstable...."

His mother had been right. Katsuki couldn't even stop himself from fucking attacking reporters. What the fuck was wrong with him? The heroes would see it now. They would think he was violent. That he did it on purpose.

They were going to put him in the chains again. He didn't want to be in the chains again. They dug into his wrists and tore into his mind. Already he could feel the restraints on his hands, feel the muzzle in his mouth, feel all the eyes watching him struggle.

Katsuki was going to burn, and they would all watch and see nothing at all. Vaguely he registered that he was curling up into the corner. His lungs weren't working, no sound could make it's way past the voices screaming at him in his head, his sight was gone. The fire had taken his senses and it would take him next, he was sure of it.

Toshinori didn't have One for All anymore. His hero instincts had stuck around anyways. They seemed to have changed though. Now he wasn't on edge whenever there was a robbery halfway across Japan. No, now he usually found it going off in regards to his students and fellow teachers. It'd hit him hard during his speech. As soon as that was over, he found himself calling Izuku to check in. When the call didn't go through, he was in a car over to Izuku's house before he knew what he was doing.

Turns out he'd been close, but ever so slightly off on which student he needed to worry about.

Today though, he wasn't repeating that mistake. He had already given his own interview, making damn sure to get across that his retirement had been a long time coming. Young Katsuki could never have been at fault for that. There had also been a segment where he'd been able to highlight how Katsuki had already been fighting the villains when the rescue team arrived. The boy had no idea that help was nearby, and he'd still decided to take on eight capable villains rather than pretend to be swayed.

He'd only been caught up on the entire situation regarding Katsuki yesterday when he'd arrived at Izuku's house to find Aizawa there and murderous. After hearing the tale, he couldn't help but agree.

Unfortunately, he hadn't had a chance to speak to Katsuki yet. So far he hadn't even seen the blond student. Though he had found Shouto earlier, who was accompanying his father to the interviews. A bit odd for him, but it wasn't All-Might's place to judge. The boy hadn't seen Katsuki either and Endeavor was obviously no help.

Toshinori had just resigned himself to waiting until the interviews were over, when the hair on the back of his neck pricked up. His body was moving before he could even think about it, ignoring peoples' protests in favor of getting *somewhere* as fast as possible.

Somewhere, as it turned out, was the far restroom. The moment the door was open he saw two vulturous reporters reaching for his student who was huddled on the ground. The teenager was flinching back from them, and Toshinori's vision went red.

He no longer had One for All, but that didn't mean he couldn't throw a mean punch. The one who was reaching for Katsuki was knocked upside the head while the one a little further back was grabbed by his collar and shoved. Both of them were too shocked to fight back, and in under a few seconds they were out of the restroom and into the hands of a security guard who had followed his mad rush. After a few deep breaths, Toshinori turned back around.

Now he was left alone with a child he'd never seen before.

Katsuki was curled up into a ball, hyperventilating. He didn't seem to notice that the reporters were gone. It left Toshinori at a loss. Saving children from burning buildings had always been easy for him. This was a battle he didn't know how to fight. In all honesty, he didn't even know who he was meant to fight, or if he was meant to fight at all.

Kneeling down felt important. Slowly, he crossed the room to drop down in front of Katsuki. Seeming smaller was easier out of his muscle form. It took a moment before it hit him he should try talking to the shaking teenager.

"Katsuki? My boy, you don't need to be afraid. I am here now!"

The words weren't heard. It didn't even appear that Katsuki could see him, let alone hear him.

Instinctively, he reached out to put a hand on Katsuki's shoulder.

That got a reaction. Instantly red eyes were fixed on him, blown wide open. Then broad shoulders were being slammed up the wall of the bathroom. Hands scrabbled at the tile floor, trying to push back further. Katsuki was gasping for air desperately as words flooded out of his mouth.

"I'm sorry. I'm-. I didn't mean to, I swear. I'm sorry. I was trying so hard, but there was too much. I wasn't trying to-. I swear. I can't-. Don't wanna go back in chains. I'm s-sorry."

Toshinori had fucked up in his life before. Plenty of times. He'd accepted it was part of being a hero. Sometimes you couldn't save everyone. Sometimes you made the wrong call, and sometimes people died or got hurt because you did. It was awful, but you had to learn and move on from it. He had had to look family of sidekicks in the eye and tell them that their child, spouse, or sibling didn't make it. Sometimes it was the family of the victims he wasn't fast enough to help. Once or twice he'd been trapped with someone and had to tell them they weren't going to make it out alive.

None of his prior mistakes hit him quite as hard as this one did. It slammed into him harder than any blow.

Because Katsuki wasn't lost in memories. Fear may have overtaken the child, but those red eyes were seeing clearly now.

Katsuki knew All-Might was the one reaching for him, and he was terrified. There was nothing Toshinori could do to help the child escape his panic because Toshinori was a source of it.

For the first time in a very, very long time, Toshinori found himself completely lost for what to do. He froze.

Before he could try to collect himself, the door to the restroom swung open. Mismatched eyes took in the scene quickly. Hardly able to process what they were seeing.

"Katsuki?"

Chapter End Notes

[me @ all-might](#)

Being Brave (Reprise)

Chapter Notes

Recommended Listening

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Shouto Todoroki was not having a good day.

From the moment he'd woken up everything felt weird. He'd thought he understood Bakugou. Or, no. He'd known damn well he didn't understand Bakugou. But he'd been confident in his lack of understanding. Shouto had been sure there hadn't been anything worth understanding.

Finding out how wrong he'd been had thrown his entire universe off-kilter.

So when he'd found out Bakugou was doing an interview after the pro-heros from the recuse team, he'd done something he'd never done before. Shouto had asked his father if he could come along to the interviews. Once he'd actually arrived, he'd realized he had no actual plan for what to say to Bakugou. The other had already expressed that he didn't want to talk about what was going on. He and Shouto hadn't exactly been close. Why would Bakugou want to see him of all people? Particularly after Shouto had already failed to protect him.

So instead of seeking Bakugou out like he'd intended, he'd ended up just staying close to his father's side. Which was uncomfortable for a lot of reasons. Then of course All-Might had shown up and greeted him. It seemed his teacher had been unable to locate Bakugou, and Shouto had almost offered to find his classmate on impulse. His words wouldn't come though. Instead he had just apologized quietly and said he didn't know where Bakugou was.

Afterwards, his father had looked at him with a single raised eyebrow. Shouto hated his judgement, hated that he could hear all the criticism without his father saying a word. More than anything else though, he absolutely hated the incredibly rare times when his father had a point. So Shouto had met his father's gaze and left without a word. He didn't even know where he was going, only that he needed to find Bakugou to prove he wasn't being a coward.

Something pricked at the back of his neck. It was faint, but he knew better than to ignore the feeling. His pace picked up and he let that gut feeling guide him. The feeling guided him up the stairs, through the hallways, past a burly security guard roughly dragging two reporters out, and to a restroom.

Waiting outside was a second security guard. Their eyes met. Shouto had no justification. There was no reason for him to be here. He didn't even know what was happening. The guard stepped aside and he pushed his way through the door.

All-Might was on the ground, frozen in place. When Shouto entered his teacher broke out of it enough to look back at him, but his hand was still paused in midair. Reaching. Reaching for Bakug-Katsuki.

Katsuki.

Katsuki, who was hyperventilating trying to babble out apologies. Whose eyes were locked onto All-Might. Gears clicked in Shouto's head, images flashed in his mind of standing next to a podium covered in chains. Uncomfortable, but unwilling to speak up. He didn't have the best sense of normal anyways, and all his teachers thought it was fine. All-Might thought it was fine. It must've been fine, right?

All he could see was the medal being forced into Katsuki's mouth. It had struck him as the sort of thing his father would've done. Katsuki's breathing was getting worse. His words weren't words anymore. Shouto needed to do something.

"You need to leave."

Surprisingly, All-Might didn't argue with him. The hero's gaze fell, turned back to the teenager in front of him and then nodded. Pulling back, All-Might had looked like he wanted to say something before stepping out. He'd said nothing, and Shouto didn't care enough to think about it anymore.

Instead he'd moved to take All-Might's place, kneeling in front of his classmate. Katsuki didn't seem to be able to see him, gone back to his own mind now the threat was gone. Carefully, Shouto took in the other. Most of what was going on seemed fairly typical of a panic attack. Only... Katsuki was clutching his hands into fists, palms upward and wrists pressed against the floor as far from his body as he could manage. It was a bit of an odd position.

Putting two and two together shouldn't have taken this long.

So he wasn't the only one with fears regarding their quirk.

Looking at Katsuki's hands, there was sweat building up in his palms. That was going to be a problem shortly. Shouto wasn't good at comforting others, he didn't know how to make all this better. So instead he focused on what he could help with.

"Katsuki, could I see your hands for a moment?"

The direct approach and odd question seemed to snap Katsuki out of it a bit. Now he seemed to see Shouto in front of him, if his confusion was anything to go off of. After several long seconds, he shook his head rapidly. Hm. The fists tightened and pulled back. All Shouto had to go off of was his own hatred of fire and the assumption Katsuki's experience was similar. With that in mind, he tried again.

"You won't hurt me. I'm more than capable of handling your explosions if things go wrong. I just want to clean them off for you."

Seconds ticked by as Katsuki tried to process what he'd said. Finally though, those hands were ever so slowly lifted and held out. Just as slowly they were opened, with Katsuki being very careful to keep his palms upwards. Shouto tried to keep his movements just as slow, reaching up with his left hand.

For once, his fire came easily, shimmering across Katsuki's palms and burning off the dangerous substance delicately. As soon as that was done he brought up his right hand, touching it to the tips of Katsuki's fingers and allowing a thin frost to dance outwards. It traced the lines of Katsuki's hands, not cold enough to cause damage, but enough to halt his sweating. The whole process took a few moments at most.

Silence swept over the room.

A small voice in the back of his mind was telling him he could stop touching Katsuki's hands now. His job was done there. But Shouto didn't, and Katsuki didn't pull away either.

Slowly, Katsuki's breathing began to calm as he regained control. All he'd needed was a moment of grounding.

Everything felt surreal. Like the two of them were in some alternate reality, a little pocket off from the rest of the universe where none of the usual rules applied. There were no windows, no clocks,

nothing in the restroom to indicate time was passing. No specific noises were coming from outside, just a general background hum. The whole room was white and blue. Clean in ways that felt uncomfortable given how much had happened in it. It was dimly lit with only a single ceiling light for the entire room.

At the center of this strange world were two children. Two children who hadn't even liked each other very much, in spite of the fact they were crooked reflections of each other, whether they'd known it or not. Or maybe that was exactly why they hadn't liked each other. It was hard to say.

Fuck it. Without really knowing what he was doing, Shouto moved his hands from Katsuki's to carefully pull the other into a hug. It was awkward at best, but it seemed to help. For awhile, the two of them just sat there like that. Hidden in their own little universe where things were a bit more okay.

Katsuki spoke first. His eyes had fallen to the ground, his face twisted up in a grimace. It struck Shouto how tired he looked up close. How tired he must be. First getting kidnapped, now this whole mess.

"Thank you for-. You know. That."

"It was the least I could do."

Silence. Neither of them knew what to say anymore. Again, Katsuki spoke first, eyes moving to look at Shouto, properly look at him for the first time. That gaze pierced to his soul.

"I know."

Two little words that meant so much and so little. Now it was Shouto's turn to be shocked.

"How-. I never-"

"Sports festival. I wasn't trying to eavesdrop, but you fuckers were talking loudly. It was just me in the hallway though. Nobody else heard."

“Oh.”

That. That was a lot to take in. He didn’t exactly know how to react to that. Katsuki tightened the hug for just a second.

“They’d help you too, if you told them.”

The moment it was said, Shouto already had a million reasons why that wasn’t true. It wasn’t the same thing. His father was about to be the No. 1 hero, there was no way. The whole hero system would be destabilized if he spoke up now. He wasn’t a child anymore. He could handle it now. A panic suddenly seized him as he realized Katsuki knew. He might’ve told them already. Could still tell them. Could tear his life apart. His mouth opened, but Katsuki didn’t let him speak.

“Listen, I’m not going to tell them if you don’t want me to. I don’t have any proof, and I know it’s not my place to put words in your mouth without any way to actually change shit. I’ve lived through that, and it’s no fucking help. You have to be the one who makes that choice.”

Katsuki paused then, clearly a little lost for words. His eyes narrowed in concentration, and then he was looking at Shouto again. Really looking at him.

“I know that it’s fucking terrifying to speak out. To ask for help. Fuck, it scared me more than anything else I’ve done in my life. But... sometimes you’ve gotta be brave. It’s part of being a hero, you know?”

Those red eyes were too intense. Shouto couldn’t meet them. His gaze fell instead as he considered what Katsuki had said. The other wasn’t finished quite yet though.

“It’ll be harder for you. I get that. I don’t know if they’d be able to take him to court like they are with my parents. I don’t know what would happen. But they’d help. They’re building a dorm now. There’s options. They’d listen if you told them.”

That... that was true. Really that was the core of his fear, wasn’t it? That he’d pull together all his courage to speak up, and they’d call him a liar. Or worse, tell him that it was normal. That his father had been right in what he did. He found his voice.

“I-I. I don’t know if I can.”

“I didn’t think I could, and I managed it somehow. Can’t say it’s not a fucking mess, but it’s like you’ve got a knife buried in you. Yeah, okay, getting that out is going to be bloody. It’s gonna hurt like hell, but it’s better than leaving it in. Once it’s out, you can finally start cleaning up and healing for real.”

A pause.

“This shit isn’t easy. Trust me, I know that much for damn sure. But sometimes you’ve gotta be brave and rip the bandaid hiding the wound off so you can get some proper fucking medical care. I did it. So it’s your turn. Be brave.”

There were tears leaking out of the corner of Shouto’s eyes. It had been a long time since he’d cried. Katsuki hugged him a little closer.

“I can’t-”

He took in a deep breath. Another. Another. For this part, Katsuki waited patiently. Finally he was together enough to speak.

“I don’t think I can right now, not with everything happening at once. But once things have settled down, I’ll talk to Aizawa-sensei. I promise.”

“I’m holding you to that.”

It was said with a determination, a flame that warmed Shouto. Sparking a fire inside of him he’d thought had been lost. That he’d desperately beaten down. He let his eyes fall shut. Shouto had thought that he understood what fire was. He had thought it to be like his father, destructive, angry, painful to all around it. He had thought Katsuki was like that too. Now he could feel a different kind of fire. A campfire maybe. Something to be treated with respect, not fear. A fire that kept others warm through snowstorms and heated up badly needed food. A fire that cauterized wounds so they had to stop bleeding whether they liked it or not. It was not like his father’s despite how similar it seemed on the surface, instead it was entirely Katsuki’s. Maybe, just maybe, Shouto thought, that’s what his fire could become too.

So he leaned into Katsuki’s fire, into the hug, into that determination that burned so brightly it blinded everyone around him. He leaned in and he let another’s flames engulf him for the first time

in his life.

They stayed like that for awhile. This time it was Shouto that broke the silence. A thought having come to his mind.

“How is it I came here to try and help you, yet somehow you made this about saving me instead?”

Katsuki snorted.

“I’ve been told I can be a bit contrary at times. Might have something to do with that.”

That broke Shouto, and he couldn’t help but laugh at the absurdity of this day. Katsuki gave him one last squeeze before releasing him. The two eyed each other quietly for a moment.

A buzzer went off on Katsuki’s phone. He glanced at his pocket with a grimace.

“Well, ten minutes till show-time. Glad we got that shit wrapped up beforehand.”

Wait. What.

“Are you- You’re still going to do your interview?”

Katsuki looked up at Shouto with a familiar fiery grin, determination shining in his eyes.

“I said I was gonna do it. I don’t tell fucking lies.”

With that, he pushed himself to his feet, offering Shouto a hand up as well. For a moment, all Shouto could do was look at him. Trying to figure out if he was serious. Of course he was. This was Katsuki after all.

Shouto took his hand. Allowed Katsuki to pull him to his feet. The other’s grin softened for just a

moment, before he turned towards the exit. All Shouto could do was follow after him. Katsuki opened the door, causing blindingly bright light to spill into the dim room, turning Katsuki into a silhouette for just a moment. Imposing. Impossible. Moving forward against all odds.

Very suddenly, Shouto thought he understood Izuku. Was this what Izuku had seen in Katsuki the whole time? He'd never been able to make sense of it before. Even after the kidnapping, he hadn't been able to see this. This overwhelming, burning determination which not only pushed Katsuki forward, but pulled everyone else along with him.

Now he got why Izuku had followed Katsuki. Still followed Katsuki. Looked up to him despite everything else. Once you'd seen him, really seen him, it was impossible not to.

So Shouto followed Katsuki. Outside the restroom, All-Might was waiting nervously. He was overjoyed to see Katsuki, almost going to hug him but thinking better of it at the last second. Guilt overtook his face. There was no time for them to talk, no time to start sorting out the complex myriad of issues they faced. Katsuki didn't seem to care. He pulled All-Might into a quick hug, shocking his teacher before setting out towards the stage. Fixing his hair and smoothing his clothing as he went. All Shouto could do was follow. The two children reached Katsuki's entrance position with two minutes to spare, Jeanist was just wrapping up and spotted them out of the corner of his eye, looking relieved.

There was sweat on Katsuki's hands again. He glanced down at it with a frown. One minute left.

Shouto acted without thinking, moving to take Katsuki's hands carefully and repeating what he'd done before, burning the sweat off and cooling the surface left behind. Red eyes met his, Shouto gave a hesitant grin. It felt weird on his face, but Katsuki returned it.

"Break a leg out there?" He offered.

"Nah, that's Izuku's thing. I'm no copycat."

For the second time that day, Shouto found himself stifling a laugh, then Jeanist was standing up to leave, and Katsuki was moving forward. Pausing only when Jeanist gave him a quick hug as they passed each other, murmuring something Shouto couldn't hear. Katsuki just grinned at the man brightly, as if nothing was wrong. As if nothing had happened. Then he was stepping out into the spotlight, head held high, eyes glinting, a proud smirk on his face.

Jeanist- Tsunagu. Tsunagu moved to stand next to Shouto at the side of the stage. He seemed a little confused by Shouto, but offered him a smile nonetheless. Shouto gave him a polite nod in return. Neither of them were paying much attention to the other. Both their eyes were drawn to where Katsuki was greeting the reporter. Aizawa had appeared at some point, a bit confused to see Shouto there but choosing not to comment. All-Might had caught up to them, and he was watching as well, although his gaze was still mostly guilt.

It was Tsunagu who spoke. As they watched Katsuki settled down onto the couch, looking for all the world like he had never been more comfortable.

“Katsuki really is something else, huh.”

It wasn’t a question, but Shouto nodded anyway. Distantly he could feel someone’s gaze on him, questioning, but he didn’t care to try and find out who it was. His eyes were still focused on the figure on the stage, unable to look away.

Chapter End Notes

Alternatively titled: The day Shouto Todoroki realized he might have a crush on Katsuki.

Next up, what is quite possibly going to be my favorite chapter in this.

The Hero You Become

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsunagu had to admit he had been a bit nervous about Katsuki's interview. Not that he didn't trust Katsuki, but the boy had been through so much in the past few days. He'd wondered if they were asking too much of him. Handling other people had never been his strong suit either.

His worry was unnecessary.

Katsuki was incapable of half-assing things after all.

From the moment he had stepped out onto the stage, he was running the show. Already he'd told Tsunagu that he refused to play the victim, and Katsuki held to that. Instead he'd gone for something between punk and charming, and it was working incredibly well. The anchor seemed good at their job too and took a teasing, good natured tone.

"So, I've been told that you've had a pretty interesting week, huh?"

A snort.

"You know at this point I'm starting to worry that if I survive high school, pro-hero life is going to end up boring me."

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Aizawa mouth 'if' with a look of exasperation and fondness. He didn't bother hiding his own grin.

"Alright, alright, I know you've got the whole tough guy thing going on, but surely you must've been at least a little scared being held captive by so many villains?"

"Honestly it might've been frightening if they'd had more than one brain cell between them. These

idiots straight up took off my restraints when they were asking me to join them. I'm actually a bit pissed about it. Like, assholes manage to kidnap me and then behave so stupidly afterwards that I can't even feel proud for escaping. ”

The exasperation on Katsuki's face really made the whole answer. It was taking a lot for Tsunagu not to laugh between that and the pure indignation in his tone.

“Do you worry about U.A.’s ability to keep it’s students safe?”

That got an eye roll.

“You know, I see a lot of people giving U.A. shit between this and the prior attack. But in both cases our teachers did everything in their power to keep us safe. The fact of the matter is, the only reason the other schools can talk shit is because not a single one of them has been targeted by major villains. It’s like our teachers got handed two surprise exams and got 20/20 on the first one and 39/40 on the second, and meanwhile you’ve got all these assholes sitting there and judging them for making one mistake when they haven’t taken any exams. If anything, U.A. is the only school that has *proved* it can keep it’s students safe from villain attacks. We all made it out alive in the end.”

Aizawa and All-Might both appeared shocked by Katsuke’s reply. In all honesty it was a fair point, and one Tsunagu hadn’t particularly considered. The anchor seemed equally surprised by his reply and took a moment to consider it before moving the conversation on.

It was all going stunningly well. Only ten minutes were left before it would be time for Tsunagu to head back out. By this point the entire group had relaxed. Katsuki hadn’t tripped up once, and instead he’d been playing his part to the letter. The audience was charmed, laughing along with him, taken by his determination, getting invested in his story.

Then the anchor went off script.

“Now I think we should address the elephant in the room, there’s been some concern about your

more violent tendencies. Particularly with what happened at the Sports Festival. Do you have anything to say in response to those accusations?”

The good mood was gone. Prior to the interview the station had been explicitly told they were not to ask Katsuki about the Sports Festival or accuse him of being violent. Tsunagu tensed, preparing to step in before the anchor had finished asking the question. It appeared that Aizawa was ready to do the same. Before either could move, two hands flew out to halt them. The owner of those hands, Shouto Todoroki if Tsunagu remembered correctly, fixed each of them with a look in turn he shook his head slowly.

Tsunagu wasn’t happy about it, but something about Shouto’s certainty gave him pause. Aizawa seemed to trust the boy’s judgement too, so reluctantly the two of them waited with baited breath for Katsuki’s reaction.

“Actually, yeah. I do. I’ll admit that I’ve been more aggressive about some things than I should’ve been, but I stand by my choices at the Sports Festival.”

Katsuki’s posture had straightened a little, but his voice held that same confidence. His head was held high and he met the anchor’s gaze with that fire in his eyes.

“You’re sure? Even that brutal fight with the gravity girl and the whole awards ceremony?”

That got Katsuki’s gaze to narrow, but he didn’t cave.

“Hell yeah I am. I’m sick and tired of the sexist narrative these assholes keep building around that fight. Not one person has complained about how I fought Red Riot, or hell even Icyhot. Uravity was and is a powerful opponent, and she deserves recognition for that.”

Katsuki paused, turning his eyes to his palms which had the faint glisten of sweat on them, He rolled his wrists and let out a small shower of sparks before turning crimson eyes back on the anchor, voice firm.

“I would never disrespect a fellow hero by giving them less than my all because of their gender. She gave me a damn good fight, and I gave her one in return. I don’t regret that.”

He let that sink in for a beat before moving on to address the second part of the comment.

“As for the awards ceremony, I stand by what I fucking said. I didn’t earn that medal. I got rid of it as soon as I could, since it was a lie.”

While his voice was kept at a constant volume, the tone of it grew more intense as he pressed on.

“I am many things, but I am not, nor will I ever be a liar. Nobody and nothing will change that. Not some League of Villains trying to get me to sign onto their bullshit, not some crowd that wants me to pretend to be weaker than I am to fit their gender roles, and not even All-Might himself. I don’t fake anything I do, and people can judge me for that all they like. I’ve got better shit to do than caring about what they think.”

The fire in Katsuki’s eyes was roaring now, his posture defiant and proud. A wave of admiration swept through the studio audience, and even Aizawa looked impressed by his answer. Tsunagu was so fucking proud of him.

It took several seconds for the anchor to recover, flustered by his passionate response.

“Ah, well-, uh, honesty is very important to you, huh? Was there a particular someone in your life who inspired that?”

Interestingly enough, that question gave Katsuki more pause than those prior. He took a moment to consider his answer before that determination set into his features again. The mood of the room shifted as he spoke, his voice still firm, but a bit quieter.

“My mom’s put me through a lot of shit. Emotionally, physically. It sucked. I still preferred her to my dad, and he never laid a hand on me. Because while she would mess me up, at least she was upfront about it. She never tried to pretend she cared about me. Never told me she loved me to try and justify anything. At least not before that shit yesterday. Instead he would always do that for her. He’d tell me she only did it because she loved me, that it was all for the best, and sometimes when it got really bad he’d promise me it’d never happen again.”

Katsuki took in a deep breath. This was clearly not easy for him to talk about, but he pressed on anyways, head still held high.

“I figured out he was a liar pretty damn young. Didn’t stop me from wanting to believe him. Didn’t stop me from falling for it over and over. My mom hurt me with what she did, but my dad made

everything a hundred times more painful by feeding me a million stories to try and make everything seem okay. I couldn't stop myself from falling for his shit, but I did promise myself I'd never be like him. I swore I'd never let myself be a complacent liar like him. No false sense of peace is worth that."

Two minutes left. Tsunagu was very, very tempted to head out early. Still, Katsuki was holding strong. Even though it was clearly difficult for him, he didn't waver once. Once more the anchor needed to take a second to recover themselves, having been totally blindsided by his answer.

"That's, ah, sound reasoning. I suppose that leads into our last solo question. Your mother made quite a number of accusations yesterday, but one of them was that the hero commission was taking you with the intent to turn you into a weapon. Now I think we all know that's a silly idea, the hero commission would never do such a thing, but is that something you worried about at all? Given how you were removed from your parents care so suddenly after such a display of power?"

That was also not on the list of approved questions. Beside him, Tsunagu could feel Aizawa getting angrier. He glanced to the side and noticed that Present Mic had joined his husband at some point, looking even more pissed. Good. The two of them could handle chewing out the station then.

On stage, Katsuki leveled the anchor with a long, judgemental look. For a solid minute, he just stared. Watching as the anchor grew more and more uncomfortable with the silence. Finally, he answered in a deadpan tone.

"No. No, I did not."

Mic snorted at how the anchor floundered for a way to reply to that. As luck would have it, the producers started to signal that it was time for the last segment, giving them an easy out. Quickly Tsunagu straightened his hair and brushed off his jacket. It took a second for him to get back into the right mindset. Two deep breaths, shoulders up, relax his face. No violent thoughts. Need to come across as a good guardian figure.

He tuned out the actual introduction, instead he watched for the hand wave that meant he was supposed to walk out. Katsuki's classmate gave him a nod as he passed, and that felt weirdly important. No time to think about it now though.

Tsunagu strode out onto the stage with his confidence and charm draped around him like a cape. A smile covered his face, not that it was visible, but people could tell anyways. It was like second nature to him, give a polite wave to the crowd, greet the anchor with a nod, take his seat on the

couch beside Katsuki. By habit he left a few inches between them so as not to encroach on Katsuki's personal space. Much to his (and just about everyone else's) surprise, Katsuki shifted himself to close the gap. Leaning ever so slightly against Tsunagu's shoulder.

Between that and the bright grin that Katsuki flashed him, Tsunagu thought his heart might actually melt. He allowed his posture to relax just a little more, returning the grin with a soft smile of his own before turning back to the anchor. Now this almost seemed like a game to see how much they could throw off expectations. From the look on the anchor's face, they were doing well.

"So, I see the two of you get along well. What was it like when you met for the first time?"

It seemed that they'd returned to the scripted questions. Good. Tsunagu opened his mouth to reply, having planned to talk about how he was struck by Katsuki's determination and potential, when Katsuki beat him to it.

"Actually, I'm not sure if he remembers the first time we met. At the very least I don't think he knew it was me back then."

Wait, what? Tsunagu's eyes went straight to Katsuki, but the teenager was focused on the anchor. There was no time for Tsunagu to comment, Katsuki just started in his story.

"I was like six at the time. Both of my parents work in the fashion industry, and they would drag me around to these weird events all the time. This one in particular was some sort of like, I don't even know, dinner party? It was dumb as hell. There was weird neon lighting, and I had been wrangled into some weird suit with my hair done up all wrong. They'd dragged me over right after school and by this point it was later in the evening. I had taken to sulking in the corner, waiting 'till I was allowed to leave."

Tsunagu recalled having attended a million and one such events when he was a young pro-hero. He would've recalled meeting a boy with an explosion quirk at one of them though, right?

"My dad kept trying to get me to socialize, but it wasn't working at all until he told me there was a pro-hero hanging around. So suddenly I'm way more interested in talking to people. I searched around for a bit, and found Jeanist over by one of these weird ice sculptures that were everywhere. I'd seen one of his recent fights, so I recognized him. It took me like 10 minutes to decide whether or not I should go talk to him. In the end I was too bored to resist."

Suddenly, it clicked. It wasn't that Tsunagu had forgotten this evening, but it had been awhile since he'd thought about it. He could recall those ice sculptures in vivid detail, having thought they looked creepy under the neon lighting.

"I got ready to approach him after he'd finished talking with some other adults. I ended up psyching myself out a bit so I totally forgot to introduce myself. Instead I walked up to him, looked him right in the eye, and asked 'Could you kill someone with their hair?'. So, great first impressions here."

It pulled a laugh from the audience, and it certainly helped that Katsuki still had traces of a grin on his face, recalling all this fondly.

"Turns out he'd never tried it, actually still haven't gotten an answer to that one. But we talked for a bit about his quirk. He showed me how it worked, and I completely forgot to mention my own since I was so involved in learning about his. I ended up telling him that I was going to be a hero too, and he said it was a lot of hard work. You had to be ready to give it your all every single day, no excuses. That part stuck with me. I actually started my own personal training routine not long after."

Katsuki stretched out his arms to show off the muscle tone, letting out another set of showy sparks as he did so. The crowd and even the anchor were all drawn in now. Faintly though, he recalled there had been something else that evening. Before he could parse the memories back together, Katsuki had resumed his story.

"I told him I would do just that. I was going to become the No. 1 Pro-hero and I promised I'd work as hard as I needed to get there. Of course, that's when my parents decided it was time to leave. My mom was looking for me, and I knew she'd get pissy if it took her awhile to find me. I was a bit upset because I'd been hoping to talk with him longer, but then I remembered I had my sketchbook in my backpack. So I asked him to wait for a second."

Now Katsuki looked... ever so slightly shy? It was an odd expression, but he pushed on regardless.

"I'd only picked up drawing recently, but one of the first things I drew was my future hero costume. I pulled the page out and ran back over. My mom was starting to get agitated, but that's her usual mood so I ignored her. He had waited, and I asked him if he would sign it for me."

As he spoke, Katsuki reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded piece of paper. It looked old and a bit worn, but well cared for. The look in his eyes was incredibly fond, and Tsunagu realized he knew exactly what was on that paper. It struck him that his eyes were a bit wet.

"I handed it to him. Thinking about it now I'm pretty sure he was smiling because of how silly it was, but kid me thought he was just that impressed with my costume designing skills. Took a moment for him to find a pen, but he signed it for me. Told me that he thought the giant swords might be a bit much but he thought the fins on the mask were cute. I was totally ready to tell him they weren't fins, they were explosions, and they weren't cute they were fierce. But then I saw my mom, and she was starting to look really pissed so I just thanked him and ran off to meet her. I didn't see that he'd left a note until the next morning."

As he trailed off, Katsuki unfolded the paper, smoothing it out carefully. For a moment or two, he let himself look at it with a smile. Then he turned it around so that the cameras could see it. Tsunagu was definitely tearing up now, but he couldn't bring himself to care.

The drawing was rough, although detailed for a six year old. It looked nothing like Katsuki's current costume. Bright reds and yellows made up most of it, with a big cape, two giant swords strapped to the back, and big flares on the arms and legs. The shoulders had giant spikes coming off them, and the mask covered the entire face. Just about the only parts that had made it to his current costume were the fins coming off the back of the mask and the spikes on the knees. Notes in pencil covered most of the sheet. Even now he could distinctly recall being impressed by how neat the kanji were.

What really stood out on the sheet was the note and signature tucked into the only corner of the page that hadn't been filled. Tsunagu knew what he'd written, but he leaned forward a little anyways so he could see it again.

I can't wait to see the hero you become.

- Best Jeanist

Katsuki was firmly looking off to the side, and there was just the faintest hint of a blush on his cheek. Clearly a bit embarrassed, but unwilling to leave the story unfinished.

"It was actually the reason I picked him for my internship. I was pretty torn, since there had been a few other offers from heros with quirks closer to mine. In the end, I wanted to prove I'd been keeping my promise. Besides, he'd already given me some pretty good advice about ditching the swords."

Breaking down crying was *not* good form in an interview, but god Tsunagu was close. *He'd had no idea*. Of course he'd remembered that little boy, he'd been struck by such fiery determination in someone so young. Every so often he'd thought about where he'd ended up, but he'd never

connected the dots between Katsuki and the child he'd met that night.

It took a moment for him to realize that he needed to say something. Quickly he reached up to wipe at his eyes. Cleaning away the tears and giving himself a second to regain his composure. There was so much going through his mind. Pride. Guilt. Fondness. Regret. So many words he wanted to say. A thousand different emotions he wanted to express and yet, when he opened his mouth to speak, he didn't need to think.

"I must say, you were well worth the wait."

His gaze wasn't on the camera, in fact, he'd almost forgotten that they were on live TV. All his focus was locked onto the teenager beside him. Katsuki froze at his words, taking a second to process before his eyes flew up to look for any trace of a lie. A heartbeat passed. A soft smile broke out on Katsuki's face. The faint blush was a pink dusting now, and red eyes fell to the drawing in his hands.

"I've still got a ways left to go before I'm a proper hero, lots of shit left to learn and all that. Still in my first year, somehow. Even though it feels like it's been ten at least. But... I'm proud that I've been able to keep my promises so far."

There had been more questions planned, but the story had taken up most of the allotted time. All that was left were a scripted line or two about future heroes, well wishes for the future, and polite goodbyes. Each of them waved before standing to step off the stage. Katsuki gently folding up the piece of paper before following after Tsunagu. Behind them the anchor was doing some sort of wrap up, but the words were irrelevant.

Red eyes were still focused on the ground as they left the view of the camera. They were only a handful of paces off from where the rest of the group was waiting. Tsunagu slowed his step a little so he was beside Katsuki. He kept his voice low enough only the teenager could hear it.

"I still think the fins are cute."

That got him a half-hearted glare, the smile not quite hidden on Katsuki's face.

"I still want to know if you can kill people with their hair, I mean, it's a weird fiber, but it should count."

“I never got around to trying that. I’ll have to let you know when I do.”

Katsuki snorted just as the two of them reached the others. Aizawa had already started in on one of the producers for allowing the anchor to ask questions on what had been explicitly listed as off-limits. It appears that Present Mic was torn between helping with the lecture and congratulating Katsuki for having handled the situation so well. All-Might was looking a bit... lost and guilty. It didn’t escape Tsunagu that Katsuki wasn’t looking at his teacher, pointedly focused on talking with Shouto. Not that he blamed the teenager, but it still felt a little off. Like something had happened between them.

Originally he’d be planning to check in with his PR coordinator who had been waiting off to the side, just to ensure there was nothing else before they could head out. Instead he slipped through the gathered group over to where All-Might was watching. It took a second before All-Might noticed him, which was also odd. They were standing off from the rest of the group, fair enough away that they wouldn’t be overheard. Even so, Tsunagu chose to fix All-Might with a questioning look rather than speak.

There was that guilt again. All-Might was silent for a long moment, and then he seemed to realize something. His expression changed, more concerned and serious now. The look he gave Tsunagu screamed that something was up, but he still stayed quiet, as if trying to find words. It was up to him to break the silence then.

“... Did something happen between you and Katsuki?”

Still lost for words. Seconds ticked by. Tsunagu’s gaze turned towards where Aizawa was now all but threatening what appeared to be studio management. Present Mic was also incredibly pissed. It hit him that although the anchor had been out of line with their questions, this level of response was over the top, even with Aizawa’s usual disdain for the media. Puzzle pieces start clicking into place, but he was still missing the picture. Finally, All-Might spoke.

“Nobody’s had the chance to catch you up on what happened during your interview yet, have they?”

Instantly Tsunagu was looking at the former pro-hero, his mood turned stone cold. All-Might sighed.

“I’ll let Aizawa know to keep his eye on Katsuki, then we can talk privately.”

Chapter End Notes

Katsuki designed his costume, although it was actually made by a support company and so you cannot convince me there aren't 1000 draft versions of it spanning from when he was a little kid to his final submission.

Also, as a note, updates may get a bit slower from here on out, that's because we're moving into the climax of the main story line and the chapters are getting longer since there's more that needs to happen in each one.

Real Friends

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It took ten minutes for All-Might to relay what happened. Well, it took two minutes for him to tell Tsunagu what had happened, four minutes for him to convince Tsunagu that the reporters had already been arrested and going after them now wouldn't change anything, then four more minutes for Tsunagu to be in a reasonable mindset again.

Why was it any time he left Katsuki alone someone decided it was the perfect time to try to hurt him? Why couldn't the child just get one break? One day where the world wasn't dead set on tearing him down when he was already fighting so hard to keep himself steady. Was that really so much to ask?

The worst part was there was nothing to be done about it this time. Nothing Tsunagu could do now anyways. Arrests had already been made, Katsuki had been calmed down by his classmate, and he was left standing here. Hearing about it in past tense.

All-Might appeared to be feeling the same way. Tsunagu had known All-Might for quite a long time. They had never been particularly close, but they'd worked together often enough and All-Might was an easy man to get along with. Confident, passionate, kind, well-mannered and loyal. Always ready to leap into action with a plan and a bright smile. In all the time he'd known the other hero, he'd never seen him look this lost before. The two of them had been standing in silence for some time now, and it was clear that the other wasn't going to break it. Didn't know how to. Tsunagu sighed.

"You need to talk to him about it. Not right now, but before summer's end. I've been waiting to have a conversation with you, Aizawa, and Nezu regarding the Sports Festival. When that conversation happens we can discuss a good time for you to sit down with him."

A nod, but All-Might still looked lost. As if he'd been asked to navigate an ocean without knowing what water was, let alone how to read a map or steer a boat. So Tsunagu tried a new route.

"You know, I've spoken about what happened that day with him. What happened at the Sports Festival has caused him a lot of harm. It hurt him not just because it was dehumanizing and humiliating, but it hurt him because it was done to him by people he trusted and respected. It hurt him because he was convinced he deserved it, and almost nobody told him otherwise. No two ways about it, you fucked up."

He paused to let that sink in, because that was an important part of this conversation. The guilt on All-Might's face was overwhelming.

"But, you also weren't the only one to fuck up that day. I sat there and watched the whole event. I formed lasting opinions about him based on a biased narrative that was being presented to me without bothering to think critically about it. By the time he came to me for his internship I was so caught up in the narrative that had been built around him that I utterly failed as a mentor for him. It was only luck that gave me a second chance with him. Luck and the fact that Katsuki is impossibly resilient."

Another pause to collect himself and press onwards.

"Yes, we both have made grievous errors in how we treated him in the past. But Katsuki doesn't need our guilt right now. He's trying to press ahead to be a better person, and we both owe it to him to do the same. Even after what occurred at the Sports Festival, Katsuki still looks up to you. So become someone he should be looking up to. Speak with him, let him know you're sorry for your mistakes, and do better in the future. That's all we can do now."

That seemed to have gotten through to the former hero, he was looking at Tsunagu now, slight tears in his eyes, but determination shining through. It was a much nicer expression than the guilt from before.

"I-. You are right, he deserves that much at the very least."

Silence fell between them for a little bit, long enough for both of them to reflect on the day so far. Finally, Tsunagu broke it.

"I ought to head back now, we're going to meet one of his friends at my office and I'd rather not make a bad impression by being late."

"Ah, Young Kirishima I assume?"

"Yes, to my understanding he and Katsuki are quite close."

All-Might gave a snort of fond amusement.

“They certainly are now. Kirishima decided he was going to befriend Katsuki after the villain attack at the training facilities, regardless of Katsuki’s opinion on the matter. Took him a bit, but endurance is his strong suit.”

Then All-Might paused for a second, considering something, and a slight grin found its way onto his face. He seemed almost teasing, though Tsunagu couldn’t guess why.

“He’s a brave, well-mannered, and passionate student, very heroic in nature and his determination can rival Katsuki’s or Izuku’s when pressed. You may find yourself running into some... disagreements with him though.”

If that wasn’t suspicious, Tsunagu didn’t know what was. But his phone pinged him, which meant his PR manager was looking for him. They had spent a while talking, and he really needed to head back to Katsuki so they could leave. So he started back towards where they were waiting, offering one last comment on the matter as he left.

“While I can’t guess what you’re trying to insinuate, I am sure that I won’t have any issues with him.”

That, as it turned out, was a lie.

When he’d gotten back to Katsuki, he’d found his classmate, Shouto, still talking with him. It seemed the two were engaged in a debate over what sort of support weapons were suited to hero work. Present Mic had joined in on the debate, as had Kamui Woods who must’ve stuck around after his own interview. Aizawa had been watching the lot of them fondly from a vantage point while pretending to sleep.

The debate had ended once Katsuki had noticed he was there, and had asked if it would be alright for Shouto to tag along with them to his office. Of course that was more than fine with Tsunagu, though he did text Endeavor to ensure that the boy’s father was fine with the plan, and the three of them had left together by car. The drive to the office wasn’t long, but in that time Tsunagu learned that Shouto was quite a polite young man, if a touch blunt.

He also didn’t miss how the boy looked at Katsuki.

But that wasn't his place to comment on. Not right now anyways.

Kirishima had already arrived at the office and was waiting in one of the casual meeting rooms for his friend. The receptionist had seemed a bit off when relying that, but there had been no time for Tsunagu to ask her if everything was alright. Originally, Tsunagu had planned on going to meet him before anything else, but there had been a few other pressing matters requiring his attention. So instead he'd sent Katsuki and Shouto ahead while he went to deal with the situation. Most of it had been easy enough to clear up, a few PR statements confirming what he'd said in his interview that day, filing a mission report to be added as evidence to the upcoming court date. The set of books he'd requested were delivered without issue. They were already loaded up into the car they'd take back to the apartment later, taking one more thing off his plate.

He'd been pleased to find out that Karen had not only made sure that both of the Bakugous were blacklisted from anything associated with his agency, but neither were allowed within 500 feet of his office, and she'd made quite a bit of progress on getting them blacklisted from anyone the fashion side of his agency did business with. Really, that woman was the real hero of his office. He made a note on his phone to get her some of those chocolates that she and her wife both loved.

All of that had been well and good, and once it was wrapped up he'd gone to check on Katsuki and meet Kirishima. The door to the room was open already, and as he approached he'd heard soft laughter coming from it. His mood had been so good, he'd been caught completely off guard when he peered inside.

It'd been enough to shock him into leaving before any of them saw him. He'd stumbled backwards, leaning up against the opposite wall in horror. Thankfully, there was nobody else in the hallway. After half a second to recover, he fumbled to grab his phone, opening up the hero chat, he hardly even noticed the earlier messages from during his interview.

Hawks: Man, I'm glad you guys are going to be able to reframe everything, but it sucks that you can't just say "she's a lying bitch who abused her kid and how dare you fuckers listen to her"

Hawks: Like, I get it, it'd hurt the case, and the kid doesn't want people seeing him like that, but damn if she doesn't deserve it.

Thirteen: If it helps, our refusal to respond to her outside of the official statements probably hurts her far more than any attack would.

Thirteen: At this point I am sure she's well aware that she will not be winning the court case, this was entirely an attempt to lash out.

Thirteen: By refusing to even acknowledge her attacks, we can show she failed and it takes away any ground for people to try and continue the fight.

Hawks: Fair enough, just feels like she's getting off too easy for my taste.

Present Mic: Her real punishment will be watching Katsuki grow into a wonderful pro-hero and knowing that she lost that.

Present Mic: She'll have to see his name and face everywhere, hear people talking about him constantly and she won't be able to say a word.

Gang Orca: On a slightly related note, Tsunagu is doing his interview now. I've got to head back to my sector for a patrol, but I'm keeping my eye on it.

He didn't have time to read through all these now, instead he scrolled through to the most recent messages.

Snipe: @Gang Orca trust me tune in right now

Snipe: I think Jeanist might actually be about to cry

Present Mic: I had no idea that Katsuki met Jeanist when he was younger!

Present Mic: It makes sense though, they would've had a lot of chances to cross paths.

Present Mic: Wait

Present Mic: Shouta, did you know about this?

Eraserhead: Maybe

Hawks: I cannot believe you didn't tell us!!

Ectoplasm: Wait, how did you know Aizawa?

Eraserhead: I go over all the internship choices for the classroom

Eraserhead: His seemed a bit odd to me, so I asked him about it

Eraserhead: I didn't get the full story that we're getting now, but he told me he'd met Jeanist when he was younger and was inspired by him.

Eraserhead: It was one of the reasons I decided it was a good idea for Tsunagu to keep custody.

Gang Orca: Yeah, Tsunagu's definitely crying right now.

Gang Orca: Can't blame him to be honest

Gang Orca: After all the shit that happened earlier, I'm glad there's at least one highlight to it all.

Snipe: Okay, so first things first that was absolutely adorable

Snipe: Second, can I just say I'm eternally grateful to Jeanist for convincing Katsuki to nix the giant swords

Present Mic: Agreed.

Ectoplasm: Yeah that would've been bad.

Hawks: Hey, swords are cool and Jeanist is a killjoy

Hawks: I've got like 10 giant swords on my back sort of

Eraserhead: yes, that's how we know it's a bad idea

Hawks: Y'all suck

Snipe: Aw, Hawks

Hawks: Wait shit no

Hawks: The cowboy's infected me

Hawks: How do I get it out?

Snipe: No turning back now.

Snipe: The hat shows up in the mail after a few weeks.

Best Jeanist: someone help

Gang Orca: Shit, what's going on? I'm a bit far away but I can get there in about 15 minutes if it's an emergency.

Present Mic: Likewise, we aren't that far away.

Snipe: I'm not exactly in the neighborhood, but I have my sniper rifle on me

Hawks: I'm further out than anyone else, but I can still get there in about 10 minutes if I push it.

Eraserhead: hang on, wait

Eraserhead: Kirishima was meeting Katsuki afterwards right?

Eraserhead: which means tsunagu probably just met Kirishima

Eraserhead: whose not in school currently

Present Mic: Oh?

Present Mic: OH

Eraserhead: my condolences tsunagu, we've all lived through this.

Snipe: Man I'd almost forgotten about how that was gonna go over

Snipe: I still think y'all are too judgemental

Ectoplasm: Well, you are the last person who gets to comment on that Snipe

Gang Orca: Sorry I'm lost right now

Hawks: Ditto

Hawks: What's wrong with Kirishima, he seemed nice when Toyokami mentioned him?

Present Mic: Personality wise, Kirishima is a wonderful young man.

Present Mic: His fashion sense... is a bit off at times.

Gang Orca: Ah.

Gang Orca: Tsunagu, you have to accept that sometimes people will have a different taste in clothing from you.

Gang Orca: No need to scare us all over something like that.

Best Jeanist: He's Wearing Mismatched Crocs

Gang Orca: ... Alright, so maybe that reaction wasn't unjustified.

Gang Orca: Deep breaths Tsunagu.

Hawks: What's wrong with crocs?

Snipe: Hawks, buddy, trust me on this one, just stay quiet unless you want Tsunagu to come after you next.

Best Jeanist: He's Wearing Them With Socks

Present Mic: If it makes you feel any better, Katsuki has forcibly taken over planning his outfits for anything formal.

Best Jeanist: it does a little bit.

Tsunagu followed Kugo's advice, grounding himself and trying to keep in mind that Kirishima was a wonderful young man who had saved Katsuki's life and he was just a bit misguided, that was all.

He could do this.

This time he was ready for it when he stepped into the doorway. It took him a moment to control the very powerful impulse to try and burn those awful shoes on sight, god not to mention his odd neon shirt that constrained with his shorts and socks. Once he'd managed to get past the fashion monstrosity, he was able to take in the scene a little more clearly. Katsuki looked the happiest that Tsunagu had ever seen him. Relaxed as his friends were having some debate between them. Really, Tsunagu hadn't meant to just stand in the doorway and watch them, but he found himself unable to speak and break the image in front of him.

So far, today had been a lot of ups and downs. The interview had gone well as far as Katsuki was concerned, he was still a bit embarrassed from talking about the first time he'd met Tsunagu and letting on that he had admired the hero for so long. Plus it would've been nice if the anchor hadn't fucking sprung questions on him like that. But oh well, it was over with. He was proud of how he'd answered, and on some level it felt good to have gotten it out there. Shouto had been waiting for him afterwards too which was nice. He'd glanced to the side once or twice just to see if Shouto was still there, and he was every time. Feeling those eyes on him had been what spurred him to talk about his parents, something he'd been on the fence about during the lead up. After all, he couldn't ask Shouto to be brave and then wimp out himself. Katsuki needed to make sure Shouto knew he wasn't going through this alone, he knew what it was like, and if he could speak out then so could the other teenager.

Though speaking of not going through things alone, the real highlight of his day had been arriving at Tsunagu's office. It had been awhile since he'd been here, but he still remembered where everything was.

Eijirou has been waiting for him. God, opening the door to see him sitting on the couch, shorts, some awful shirt, his stupid mismatched crocs and that smile on his face. That alone was enough to make Katsuki grin, unable to help the fondness at just how ridiculous his best friend looked. A heartbeat passed in which they just looked at each other. Then Eijirou was across the room, tackling Katsuki while sobbing something about manliness that Katsuki didn't care about. All he cared about was Eijirou's arms wrapped around his shoulders, warm, protective, grounding, *safe*.

For the first time, Katsuki didn't shrug those arms off, didn't yell or spark off, instead he threw his arms around his friend too and held on for dear life. He was definitely grinning now and he didn't care in the slightest. It felt good to just rest his head on Eijirou's shoulders, ignoring the rest of the world. At some point Eijirou quieted down, probably having realized that Katsuki wasn't listening yet. They stayed like that for a bit. Katsuki was the one who broke contact, releasing his friend to take a step back. He would've held on a little longer, but he'd just remembered who else was here

and he didn't want Shouto feeling awkward.

Eh. Might be a little late for that. Shouto was watching the two of them from the doorway, unsure of what to do with himself. Now that he'd looked up, Eijirou noticed Shouto as well. Probably would've been a good idea to give him a heads up, but the whole situation had escalated so quickly that Katsuki hadn't really had a chance to think ahead. Luckily, Eijirou was the friendliest person alive and so fucking understanding. A moment of confusion passed and then he lit up with that bright grin of his.

“Dude! I didn’t know you were coming too! You must’ve met up with Katsuki at the interview, right? Must’ve been cool to get to see all that happening in person. Everyone else and I just watched it live. I was actually kinda wondering why you weren’t commenting on it at all.”

That seemed to remind Eijirou of something, and he bounced on his feet, spinning around to dart back to the couch. Katsuki was pretty sure he knew what was coming, but for once he didn’t fight it. Instead he just reached over to snag Shouto’s sleeve to pull him into the room since the other still looked lost. The other teenager stumbled a little bit, but got his footing back quickly. Just in time for Eijirou to return with his phone.

“Okay, I promised the chat I’d grab a photo to prove you were actually still alive and not an imposter. Hang on-”

Gently he pushed Shouto into Katsuki’s left side, and knowing this was inevitable, Katsuki just shifted so his shoulder wasn’t digging into Shouto’s side. Eijirou then darted around to Katsuki’s right side and held up his phone to get a good angle.

“Smile!” He called, flashing his own sharp toothed grin. Obviously, Katsuki didn’t smile. He rolled his eyes, but exaggerated the motion enough that any of his classmates should see the underlying fondness. Shouto was still trying to process what was going on, but he managed a really awkward looking half-smile. The flash went off and Eijirou checked the photo, still smiling. Since he was standing next to Katsuki, the other was able to peer over his shoulder just a bit to see the shot.

“Perfect!” Eijirou declared, and he sent it off to their class chat with a message that Katsuki couldn’t quite make out. Mentally, Katsuki made a note to save the photo later. It would be a nice way to remember the eventful day. For right now though, he just gave his friend a light nudge, releasing Shouto’s sleeve as he did so.

“Alright, you got your dumb photo, now both of you go sit your asses down so we can eat lunch.

I'm starving."

That got him a laugh from Eijirou, but he and Shouto complied nonetheless. Katsuki turned to his backpack and pulled out the food he'd prepared the night before. He'd made extra since he hadn't been sure how hungry he or Eijirou would be, so an extra person wasn't an issue. Tsunagu had told him that they could just have food delivered to the office, but given all the other shit that had happened over these past few days, Katsuki wasn't trusting any food unless he'd made it himself. Was he being paranoid? Probably. Did he have every fucking right to be? Hell yeah he did. Besides, cooking was relaxing.

Heating up the food and plating it only took a minute or so during which Eijirou had struck up a conversation with Shouto. They were both seated on a couch, a few feet between them leaving Katsuki the interesting problem of deciding where to sit. There was a chair across the table that he could take, but that felt too impersonal. Had it just been Eijirou in the room it would've been easy enough. Katsuki didn't mind leaning up against him when the two of them were alone. With Shouto in the room, it felt a bit more... intimate. He considered his options while stirring some extra spice into his dish.

In his head, he could hear his mother snapping at him not to touch things. Not to touch people. Don't hug your grandmother, her health is fragile enough she'd say. Stay away from your younger cousin, you'll probably end up killing her she'd snap. Don't you dare try to hug me brat, I know what your hands do she'd yell. That had been the rule. Don't touch anyone, they won't try to touch you. As soon he'd gotten his quirk she'd made sure he never forgot how dangerous he was. How violent. How he put others at risk by being near them.

As he'd been slowly learning since starting at U.A., his mother's rules were mostly wrong. So rather than trying to find a way to sit on the couch without touching either of them, he said fuck it. He was sick of letting her shit scare him off.

Katsuki sparked off his hands just in case, snagged all three dishes of food, set two onto the table in front of each of the other teenagers and plopped down in between them. He twisted up, laying his legs across Shouto's lap and propping his head up against Eijirou's legs. While Shouto seemed a bit stunned and unsure by the contact, Eijirou seemed delighted. It only took a second for the red haired boy to shift so Katsuki's head was in his lap, then he was grabbing his own food to dig in. After a second or two, Shouto followed suit.

They were all mostly quiet while they ate, it was late for lunch so all of them were hungry. Only after they'd finished eating did Eijirou break the silence. At some point his hand had found its way into Katsuki's hair, combing through it gently. Almost anyone else on the planet would've lost their hand for such an act. But for Eijirou, Katsuki allowed it. Allowed himself to relax into it.

“So, guess there’s been a lot of stuff happening I didn’t know about, huh?”

His tone was trying to be light. Trying to joke around. None of them were falling for it. Katsuki debated his options. It was meant as an open invitation. If he brushed the statement off, Eijirou would let it go. That much he was sure of. Shouto wasn’t going to pry either. But... Tsunagu had said talking about it might be a good idea. And... honestly after today, he kinda wanted to have at least a few other people that knew the whole story. Or most of it. Not to mention he could already hear the guilt in Eijirou’s voice, and he needed to put a stop to that right now. Sure, it was going to be uncomfortable, but he was no coward.

Just gotta be brave sometimes.

Right.

“You and everyone else. Even Izuku never knew how bad it got, and he grew up with me. I’m good at hiding shit and I’d been convinced I deserved what was happening. Only reason anything changed was she went after me right after Tsunagu brought me home from the hospital. She’d hit me in front of middle school teachers before and none of them had ever cared, so I guess she assumed he wouldn’t either. But he did.”

Deep breaths. Those hands kept stroking through his hair and grounded him.

“As long as I can remember she’s been like this. Honestly the physical stuff wasn’t usually too bad, she’d slap me around a bit but I’d get worse injuries from training. She got in my head a lot though, between her and my dad. Convinced me of a lot of negative things about myself and other people. For a long time I didn’t really know what she was doing was wrong. I repeated some of it. I was a bully, to put things lightly. Mostly towards Izuku, but other kids too. It was basically the only way I knew how to interact with other people, and teachers never gave me shit for it. Hell basically nobody but Izuku ever did.”

Admitting to that stuff was harder than he’d thought it would be, but he refused to omit it. If he did he was no better than his father, telling a pretty half-truth.

“U.A. was the first place that I ever got real pushback. Still didn’t get how the hell I was supposed to change, but I was starting to understand that I needed to. Around the same time I’d started listening to other people talking about their parents. You’d be talking about your moms or Raccoon Eyes would talk about her folks, and I finally started to piece together what was going on at my house wasn’t normal after all. I didn’t do shit about it though because by that point, like I said, I was convinced I deserved it.”

He took in a few more deep breaths. Eijirou didn't press. Didn't push him for more. Just let him talk at his own pace.

"Tsunagu stopped her and got me out of her reach. Convinced me I didn't deserve it and that I needed to get the fuck out of there. He... He and I didn't really get along when I did my internship. But he still gave a shit about me, still gave me more of a choice than just about any other adult in my life. Since he found out what was really going on, he's been there for me. The adoption thing is a bit complicated. Usually U.A. takes custody for shit like this, but with the Sports Festival and the whole kidnapping thing and all that, it just wasn't the best idea."

Another pause. He needed to collect his thoughts.

"It's not gonna be perfect, I mean, you've seen how hard life has been trying to fuck me over this past week. But it'll be better. He wants to help me, and I think he can more than anyone else right now. I've got a lot of shit to sort through emotionally. Shit I need to unlearn and shit I need to learn in the first place. I think he can help me with that."

Eijirou's hand was still moving through his hair. He relaxed into it for just a moment before finishing up.

"So yeah. There's been a lot going on in my life. Lots of shitty stuff in my past, probably going to be dealing with that for awhile, but things are getting better now. Like I said, I'm gonna be okay. Just gotta take some time to sort things out."

There was quiet in the room after that. Katsuki's eyes were closed, had been the entire time he'd been talking. It was close to a minute before he could gather his courage to open them. To look up at his friend's face.

He shouldn't have been surprised to find that Eijirou had tears in his eyes. Despite the waterworks, his friend also had a wobbly grin, and his expression looked more proud than anything else. His hand had stopped moving in his hair. Instead Katsuki found himself pulled upwards as Eijirou wrapped him up in an awkward hug. From this angle he could see Shouto again who was looking at him with a weird expression in his eyes. He didn't have the time to dissect it though, since Eijirou had found his voice again.

"I-I'm really glad you're doing better. Fuck I-." Eijirou paused to rub at his eyes and try to wipe away some of the tears. "You're just so fucking strong Katsuki. I don't know how you're still

standing after all of this, but I'll do whatever I can to help you. I promise I'll be there, okay? No matter what!"

Katsuki leaned up into the hug, letting himself enjoy it for just a second.

"I know you will Sharky. You've already fuckin' proven that. You and the rest of the idiots who ran into a full scale villain attack to save my ass. I know I can trust you lot have my back for this shit."

That was both the right and wrong thing to say. It set Eijirou off so he was crying for real, but they were happy tears and the expression that he pinned Katsuki with made it feel like Katsuki was at the center of the universe. Like the damn sun itself.

Now that he thought about it, it wasn't too different from how Shouto was looking at him. Huh. Weird. Maybe this was how friends were supposed to look at each other?

After that they had settled down some, the conversation switching to lighter topics. He found himself laughing, relaxed and able to really let go for the first time since the training camp. Turns out Shouto wasn't half bad once he stopped keeping to himself. Guy was way more of a sassy shit then he'd let on, and it was fun to debate with him. There was more pushback than Katsuki got from Eijirou. While Eijirou was a solid rock who stood his ground, Shouto gave as good as he got.

It was nice. Felt like they were equals. As the other teenager grew more comfortable, he'd taken to messing with Katsuki's hands. Usually people touching his hands was a hard no-go for Katsuki, but Shouto was safe. He understood how dangerous fire could be, and he'd proved that he could take it. So Katsuki let him trail a very mild flame up and down his palms, causing little popping explosions whenever he hit a spot with sweat. There were also no protests when Shouto took to tracing patterns with a very light frost across his hands. The sensation was oddly pleasant, and it kept him from needing to spark off. Between that and Eijirou's careful hands stroking through his hair, Katsuki found himself unable to keep his eyes open for long. He wasn't falling asleep, too amped up after everything else to nap, but he was probably the most relaxed he'd ever been around other people. It was easy to lose himself in it. The conversation was easy to keep up with, having now turned into something about cats vs dogs as pets. Shouto and Eijirou apparently had very different opinions on the matter and Katsuki was more than happy to let the two of them do most of the arguing while he commented every so often.

Maybe that was why it took them so long to notice Tsunagu standing in the doorway.

I do want to mention that this work in the series will be staying gen/with crushes only, mostly because Katsuki is not at a place in his life where he could handle a romantic relationship. He's not even sure what the hell a friendship is really supposed to be yet, so he's got awhile before he's going to be ready to date anyone.

Catching Up and Moving On

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Katsuki was the one to notice him. He blinked his eyes open to see Tsunagu standing in the doorway to the room, watching them with a fond look. It took a good part of his self-control to suppress the instinct to startle, but he managed. Above him neither of the other two teenagers had noticed someone else was in the room, instead Eijirou was making some point about trainability and Shouto seemed vaguely offended while absentmindedly tracing a geometric pattern onto Katsuki's right palm with his frost.

Still, as nice was this was, Katsuki wasn't comfortable with just leaving Tsunagu in the doorway and the older man probably didn't want to interrupt the conversation. So he made up his mind. He let Shouto finish the pattern and then carefully flexed his hands. Icyhot got the message and shifted so that Katsuki could stretch out his arms properly. Once his arms were feeling a bit looser he pushed himself up enough that he could headbutt Eijirou gently, an affectionate gesture that had become somewhat normal between the two of them prior to this whole mess. The hand in his hair gave one last stroke before it moved so he could roll himself into a sitting position. He'd mostly recovered from the events at the training camp and the kidnapping, but his body still had a hint of soreness lingering. He stretched out as he stood up, careful to move each muscle in turn.

By this point his classmates had figured out something was up, but they were still watching him rather than looking around the room. God, these idiots were going to die way before they became heroes if this was the peak of their awareness. Katsuki considered calling them out on it, but he was in too good of a mood right now. Instead he just scooped up the three dishes from the table and made his way to the sink. Eijirou was up on his feet in an instant to offer to help, only to finally notice that someone else had entered the room.

Watching him startle, which in turn startled Shouto was incredibly satisfying. By this point Tsunagu had silently moved a bit further into the room, a mischievous glint in his eyes now he had realized Katsuki's game. He was the first one to speak after giving both of them time to recover.

"My apologies, I wasn't attempting to intrude or scare you. I just came by to see how you three were doing."

Katsuki took pity on his friends and spoke up in response.

"We're good. We had lunch and nobody has tried to kidnap, harass or otherwise injure me since I last saw you. At this point I'm counting that as a fucking miracle."

His mentor gave a snort of amusement, though there was a more serious undertone to his eyes. It only took a few more seconds for Katsuki to finish washing the dishes and set them aside to dry on the rack. Eijirou found his voice again, his smile back as he bounded over to where Tsunagu was standing to offer his hand.

"It's nice to meet you Mr. Best Jeanist Sir. Thank you for protecting Katsuki, during the hideout raid and.. ah, afterwards."

He was definitely a bit of a fish out of water, but Tsunagu just gave him a smile. It was strangely easy to read his emotions even with the high collar of his hero costume. Hm. Katsuki wondered if that was on purpose or not. Regardless, Tsunagu took his hand and responded politely as ever.

"Mr. Hakamata is just fine. I really ought to be saying that to you though, Katsuki said you were one of the students who helped rescue him."

That got Eijirou blushing, but he nodded nonetheless.

"Ah- Yeah. Shouto, Izuku, Momo and Tenya all helped too. We just couldn't leave him there. He- Katsuki means too much to all of us for that."

That got Katsuki to focus intently on the floor. He knew it was true. Eijirou wouldn't have gone to that damn battlefield if he didn't mean it, and Eijirou didn't lie about that stuff anyways. But it was still strange to hear said out loud. It was weird to hear that people cared about him. A nice sort of weird though.

Tsunagu's smile held up and he gave a soft nod.

"As a pro-hero I'm supposed to tell you that what you did was highly risk and should not be repeated in the future without permission from your teachers or your provisional licenses. However, I also know that I would've done the same thing in your situation, as would almost any of the pro-heros I've met. Regulations are in place for a reason, but at the same time they do not cover every case. The situation could have ended poorly if you hadn't acted. But do be careful in the future."

Eijirou nodded feverishly, looking relieved to not have gotten a lecture. From his place on the couch Shouto also nodded. That seemed to satisfy Tsunagu who turned his attention to Katsuki.

"I'm very glad that in the end, everyone made it out alive. Attacks like this are unprecedented and highly dangerous. The fact that nobody was killed is a testament to the strength of hero society and its future."

All three teenagers gave a quiet nod to that. Katsuki repeated it to himself in his head. Nobody was killed. They'd all made it out okay. Even though it would've been so easy for that not to have been true.

After a second or two, Tsunagu relaxed his posture and spoke once more; clearly aiming to shift the mood.

"Well with that said, I would love to hear about how you and Katsuki became friends. When All-Might mentioned you he said something about the attack on the training facility?"

That certainly shifted Eijirou's mood back to his bright self. He was more than happy to start talking about the attack, and the two of them quickly moved to sitting down as Eijirou recounted everything that had gone on that day. Katsuki was listening in half-heartedly, though he would admit he was a bit embarrassed to hear Eijirou talk about how he'd immediately wanted to go after the most dangerous villain in the place. So rather than engaging in the story, he decided to turn his attention to his phone. The group chat had quite a bit that he'd missed while the interviews had been going on, and he'd promised to check in every so often.

Not to mention he wanted to save that photo still.

After moving to put the dishes back up into the shelf where they belonged, Katsuki unlocked his phone and opened up the group chat, starting from the older messages and working his way forward.

Ashido: Okay, according to the lineup it should be Best Jeanist up next and then Blasty's interview

Ashido: Has anyone heard from him today by the way?

Ashido: I mean, I know he's probably busy with all of this, but he's still doing okay?

Ashido: They're not pressuring him into doing the interview, right?

Kirishima: Yeah, he messaged me like an hour ago

Kirishima: We're meeting up after all the interview stuff is done to chill out for a bit

Kirishima: He said he was fine and he's not being pressured into doing the interview

Midoriya: It's pretty hard to pressure Kacchan into doing anything anyways

Sero: Yeah he's like rubber, any pressure you put on him just bounces back to hit you in the face.

Ashido: Fair enough, I'm just a bit worried about him I guess

Ashido: I mean, talking to other people isn't his favorite activity and he's been through a lot these past few days

Yaoyorozu: Standard protocol says they should've given him the questions ahead of time and I'm sure he's been briefed by the PR managers as well as our teachers

Yaoyorozu: Odds are it will all be scripted, so there's really nothing to worry about

Midoriya: I'm sure he'll do great!

Midoriya: Talking to other people might not be his strong suit, but Kacchan is really smart and he can actually be charismatic when he wants to be

Midoriya: He just usually doesn't care about what others think of him

Jirou: Best Jeanist's interview is starting

Uraraka: Man, that injury looked awful

Uraraka: I'm glad he ended up okay

Uraraka: It's no surprise he's the No. 4 pro-hero, being brave enough to take the full force of that attack

Asui: He survived it without any sort of protective quirk too!

Asui: He must be tougher than he looks

Yaoyorozu: I must say, his statement regarding the injury was very sweet

Yaoyorozu: It's good to know that he doesn't regret the wound and that he was proud to have been doing his job.

Yaoyorozu: After the accusations from yesterday, it will be good to ensure the public understands that Katsuki was not to blame for anything that happened

Kaminari: Yeah, I'm glad they're debunking a lot of shit his mom was saying

Kaminari: Does anyone know if they're going to call her out more directly?

Kaminari: Like talk about the shit she's pulled or something?

Midoriya: Probably not, unfortunately

Ashido: Why not? She definitely deserves it at this point.

Uraraka: Agreed.

Iida: Because the case is still underway and because of its sensitive nature, none of the pro-heros involved will be able to make any accusations or share any details of the case.

Iida: It's frustrating, but an important law for privacy's sake.

Midoriya: Yeah, at this point the only one being interviewed who could talk about it legally is Kacchan himself, since it was his experiences.

Midoriya: And he probably won't want to, since it's very personal stuff and he doesn't like being seen as a victim.

Midoriya: But I'm sure the media will take a hint from all of this that she's definitely not a good person and after the court case is settled they'll come to their own conclusions.

Kaminari: I guess that makes sense.

Kaminari: Doesn't mean I have to like it though.

Ashido: Oh, I was actually meaning to ask about the court case!

Ashido: Does anyone know what the details are?

Ashido: Like I saw the date and all of that, but like, are we allowed to show up to support him and

stuff?

Yaoyorozu: Ah, I'm actually unsure of that

Yaoyorozu: The case is sealed, so it would be up to our teachers and who Katsuki would want present during the case

Yaoyorozu: And he may prefer to just have everything kept as quiet as possible

Kirishima: We talked about that a bit earlier

Kirishima: Jeanist is talking to Aizawa about security and all of that, but odds are it'll be okay for 3-4 people to attend the case.

Kirishima: As much as I know everyone in the class wants to come by to support him, it'd be way too much for him to deal with on top of everything else and there's too much risk of media slipping in.

Kirishima: He was gonna tell me the details tomorrow.

Midoriya: I'll be attending for sure since me and my mom are witnesses.

Midoriya: We can't have phones or anything in the room while the trial is underway, but we can check in with you guys during breaks and stuff just so you know everything is going well.

Asui: All of this is very important, but did everyone catch what just happened?

Kaminari: No, shit, I wasn't paying attention, what was it?

Uraraka: That was so sweet!!

Uraraka: The anchor just asked about the custody arrangement and tried to make a dumb joke about bombs waiting to go off and Jeanist totally shut that down.

Uraraka: Man you can like barely see his face in that costume and you could still tell he was pissed off.

Uraraka: Anyways he said he's been impressed with Katsuki's determination, hard work ethic, intelligence and bravery since Katsuki did his internship and that he's honored to be taking the role of his guardian.

Katsuki hadn't actually gotten a chance to see how Tsunagu's interview had gone, he'd been so

caught up with... everything else that had happened during and afterwards that it hadn't occurred to him to see what had been asked or said. He'd need to watch that at some point.

For right now he scrolled through to the messages that had been sent during his own interview.

Jirou: Okay, commercial break's done and it should be starting any minute now.

Ashido: I don't know if I'm nervous or excited.

Ashido: It's like, 50/50 but also 100% for both at the same time.

Kirishima: Katsuki's gonna do great!

Kirishima: He's manly as hell and he's not gonna let anything scare him off.

Kaminari: There he is!

Kaminari: God it is unfair that he can get kidnapped, held for like a day, have all this shit go down since then and just walk out on stage looking like a model and smiling like he owns the place

Kaminari: I wonder if I can like, get some of his confidence just by staying near him for long enough

Asui: Confidence by osmosis would certainly be nice.

Midoriya: Honestly you kinda can

Midoriya: It's hard to explain, but Kacchan's determination can be infectious once you really see it.

Kirishima: Agreed. I kept wanting to give up on studying for finals and he'd just look at me or say something gruff and all of the sudden all my motivation was back.

Kirishima: It was the only reason I passed the written stuff

Jirou: Not to interrupt but

Jirou: "If"

Shinsou: Honestly at this point I'm with him on the if

Sero: Same

Tokoyami: The year has certainly been haunted by death at every corner, though we have all managed to successfully avoid it thus far

Uraraka: Oh of course he'd complain about not getting kidnapped well enough

Ashido: I'm pretty sure Blasty would mail them an essay with everything they did wrong and how he could've kidnapped himself better if he had any free time.

Kaminari: I'm surprised he hasn't written one already and just published it online.

Katsuki snorted and scroll through the rest of those messages. None of them needed to know that he may have made a small list of all the mistakes the villains had made while kidnapping him. That was for him and him alone, and really it was more for comfort than anything else. A reminder that he'd had other ways out. Finally he reached the messages from the last half of the interview.

Jirou: Uhhh, does that question strike anyone else as inappropriate?

Kirishima: What the fuck

Kirishima: They weren't supposed to be asking about the Sports Festival at all

Kirishima: Katsuki told me so when we were chatting about it.

Uraraka: Oh my god I swear if one more fucking person brings up my fight

Uraraka: Actually now I'm kinda glad that person did because I'm pretty sure that's the nicest thing Katsuki's ever said about me and that was super fucking satisfying to hear.

Jirou: Can we all just appreciate the fact he said "Icyhot" instead of Shouto

Jirou: I don't think he even noticed he did it

Jirou: People are gonna think that's his actual hero name now

Ashido: I mean it's a better one tbh

Ashido: Damn though, I mean I know Katsuki's intense about honesty and all that, but I wasn't expecting that much passion behind the Sports Festival stuff.

Iida: I must agree

Iida: I had never particularly considered that his actions at the Sports Festival could have been motivated by his moral code rather than his aggression

Iida: Upon reflection, it seems a bit extreme that he wasn't allowed to simply deny the medal

Midoriya: It was absolutely horrific!

Midoriya: Why is it that every time I hear people bring that event they keep talking about it like Kacchan was being totally unreasonable?!

Midoriya: I wouldn't have wanted that medal either, and I would've said no too if my opponent gave up during our fight.

Midoriya: I mean sure he could've said no a bit more politely, but what were they expecting?

Midoriya: They fucking chained him to a podium and muzzled him! On TV! In front of thousands of people!

Midoriya: I'm pretty sure nobody is going to be polite to people who chain them up and muzzle them like they're some kind of animal!

Midoriya: You'd have to be pretty insane to be polite in that situation

Midoriya: They could've just let him say no and not take the medal, or given it to Shouto or something, and instead they decided to act like villains from some dumb cartoon and chain a teenager up on national TV.

Midoriya: But no, *Kacchan* was the one who was unreasonable during the Sports Festival, sure.

Midoriya: I was still stuck in the hospital at the time, but I almost went to fight All-Might myself after I watched the replay.

Midoriya: Ugh. I know they just put out an apology for it and all, but it really shouldn't have taken that long and him getting kidnapped.

Kaminari: Yeah, I'll be honest, the more I'm thinking about this the more uncomfortable I am with it.

Kaminari: Particularly considering what he just said about why honesty is important to him.

Kaminari: Like... shit man.

Jirou: Yeah, I can't think of a better way to put it.

Jirou: *Shit.*

Yaoyorozu: Ah, in better news, it appears that Jeanist is coming out to do the last part.

Yaoyorozu: I have serious doubts that these questions were an approved part of the interview, so hopefully he'll be able to make them stay on track.

Ashido: I sure fucking hope so, because at this point I'm ready to march down to that station myself!

Sero: Alright

Sero: I will be the first to admit I don't really know much about Katsuki's internship with Jeanist or what's been going on these past few days

Sero: But whatever happened, it must've been something because Katsuki is willingly touching another human being?

Sero: Like he even smiled at him

Sero: I'm not the only one seeing this, right?

Kaminari: I thought I had short circuited, but nope, this appears to be an actual thing.

Midoriya: I had doubts about Jeanist too until I met him, but when I spoke with him he was really serious about protecting Kacchan

Midoriya: Even I don't know the full extent of everything that's happened over these past few days, but it's been a lot, and from what I've heard, Jeanist has stuck by him through all of it.

Midoriya: I'm glad that he's had someone he can trust there with him.

Kirishima: Oh hang on

Kirishima: Katsuki's talking about the first time he met Jeanist?

Kirishima: But wait, I thought that was the internship?

Ashido: I mean, I guess we never asked him about it

Ashido: I just assumed that was the first time they'd met

Midoriya: Oh!!!

Midoriya: Guys trust me just listen to this story

Midoriya: I knew about this because he told me about it the next day

Midoriya: I wonder if he still has it after all these years

Uraraka: Still has what?

Midoriya: Sh, just wait and listen

Sero: We're typing

Midoriya: Shhhh!

Looking at the timestamps, it looked like everyone in the chat had actually hushed until the end of the story. God they really were idiots.

Ashido: !!!!

Ashido: That was so cute????

Midoriya: I can't believe he still has that after all this time

Midoriya: He showed it to me the morning after, he was so excited about it

Midoriya: I never knew that Jeanist was the reason he kept the flares though

Uraraka: Are we 100% sure that was actually Katsuki?

Uraraka: Like, there's no chance they've replaced him with a look-alike, right?

Kaminari: I'm pretty sure he was blushing at the end there?

Kaminari: I didn't know he could blush

Jirou: Okay but can we talk about that costume design though

Jirou: That's just so...

Jirou: Him

Jirou: I'm so glad he didn't keep the giant swords

Kaminari: Amen to that

Kaminari: Hey, Kiri, Katsuki's heading your way next, right?

Kirishima: yeah

Ashido: ...

Ashido: Are you crying right now?

Kirishima: a bit

Kirishima: a lot

Kirishima: it was just very manly of him to talk about all that

Kaminari: Well once you're done crying and he's over there you gotta make sure you get a photo of him to prove it's really him

Kaminari: And not like, a replacement robot

Kirishima: I will

Kirishima: He should be here in like half an hour I think?

From there it was only chatter until the most recent set of messages. Katsuki took a second to save the photo that had been posted before reading the rest of them.

Kirishima: [not-a-robot.png]

Kirishima: He's here and okay and Shouto is too!

Kirishima: They met up at the interviews apparently

Kaminari: Twilight zone, here we are I guess

Midoriya: I was wondering where Shouto was!

There were a few other replies but none of them were important. There was a lot of shit Katsuki could say. A lot of comments he could make. A lot of ways to reassure the lot of them he was really fine or tell 'em to fuck off with that cute shit.

He decided to focus on the most important part of the conversation instead.

Katsuki: For the fucking record I'm going to keep calling him Icyhot until he picks a better hero name

With that said and done, Katsuki turned off his phone and tucked it back into his pocket. Everything else could wait until later.

For right now he decided to go join the conversation that had somehow gone back to the pet debate. He was pretty sure Shouto was pulling up some photos of cats on leashes and he had some opinions on that.

In the end they spent another three hours hanging out. After an hour Tsunagu had had to return to paperwork, since he still needed to catch up on everything from after the raid, not to mention get a head start on all of the paperwork and PR associated with a rank shift. By the time that was sorted out it was starting to get late. After some goodbyes everyone set out for home. Shouto and Eijirou both went to take the train since the station was nearby, while there was another car waiting for Katsuki and Tsunagu.

It was weird how often he'd ridden in cars lately. Obviously it made sense, there was no way it'd be safe for him to ride the train with how much of a public figure he was right now. Still, it made Katsuki feel... off just the slightest bit. One of those little things that reminded him that his life had changed.

The car ride back to the apartment was quiet. Both of them were tired from the long day, and Katsuki was ready to settle down with some of his worksheets for the evening. At the very least he'd managed to get himself back on schedule with them. Now he just had to keep that up. Who knows, maybe he'd even be able to start working ahead. Wasn't like he had much else to do with his time.

When they arrived back at the apartment, Tsunagu grabbed a bag that Katsuki hadn't noticed before. He was sure that the man hadn't brought the bag in with them, so it must've already been there. A bit weird, but not really his place to comment. Instead he just grabbed his backpack and followed Tsunagu back up.

After they were actually back in the apartment, he ducked off to go change out of his school uniform. When he returned Tsunagu had started cooking dinner. Silently he took over cutting the vegetables, along with tweaking the seasoning. Tsunagu wasn't a bad cook, but he didn't have a lot of fine tuning. The two of them worked side by side in a comfortable sort of quiet.

Thinking back, Katsuki couldn't remember cooking with either of his parents before. Both of them could cook, but usually only did so for special occasions. Katsuki did most of the day to day cooking, which was fine by him. They both worked late more often than not, and it meant he could get his lunch prepared at the same time. Plus he almost never had to fight with his mother about eating something he didn't want to. It was an easy part of his life to control, when she wasn't trying to stop him from eating as punishment.

Still, it seemed odd in reflection that he hadn't ever cooked with them.

Or, no, it seemed *abnormal*.

He did remember cooking with Auntie Inko. She had taught him the basics of baking when he was younger. Izuku had tried to learn too, but he had never gotten it. After the third time he'd managed to burn himself Izuku had been banned from the kitchen. Even after all these years Izuku wasn't much of a cook. Maybe he could work on fixing that at the dorms.

Finishing up dinner didn't take long. They ate quietly, Katsuki lost in his own thoughts for most of the meal. He stood as soon as he had finished, taking his own dish to the sink intending on washing it before turning in when Tsunagu spoke.

"Before you head to bed, I need to talk to you about a few things."

Well alright then. Katsuki gave a nod, now a little on edge but trusting it wasn't anything bad. If it was then Tsunagu would've just led with what it was. The silence returned as Tsunagu finished his own meal while Katsuki was cleaning up. While Tsunagu was cleaning his own plate, Katsuki hesitated before deciding to sit down on the couch. Now that he was looking around, he noticed that the bag from the car was on the coffee table. Weird.

It was only a minute before Tsunagu came to join him. The other didn't waste any time, reaching into the bag on the table and pulling out a medium sized stack of books. Said books were offered to Katsuki, who took them after a moment's hesitation. He carefully looked through the titles. All of them had something to do with mental health or emotions. With a furrowed brow he glanced back up at Tsunagu for an explanation.

"Each of those was recommended by Hound Dog with you in mind. I also skimmed through them and all seemed like solid choices. Given everything you are going through right now, the only one I think would immediately be helpful is the third from the top. It's a guide for handling the aftermath of being kidnapped written by a former pro-hero after the third time someone abducted them."

Katsuki shifted the stack so he could see the book in question. It mimicked the classic style of a survival manual. Or maybe it was one in a way. Regardless the guide had a very practical look to it, which was definitely appealing.

"The others are there for when you're ready. In a perfect world you would be starting therapy shortly after the court case wraps up. However, with the media attention, lingering risk of villain strikes, and everything else, that's not currently a safe option. I have a feeling you probably aren't ready for that step either?"

It only took a moment of consideration for Katsuki to shake his head. Talking about these things with Tsunagu or his friends was one thing. Talking about them with a stranger, particularly a therapist, was going to be a whole other monster. His mother had threatened him with them before. Not seriously, but she'd occasionally ranted about having one of them drag him off to the nuthouse. She would joke with her friends about having him committed to an asylum. It was one of the threats that kept him up at night. Because he had been fairly sure that she wouldn't actually do it, but it was so easy to picture. Katsuki quickly stopped that train of thought, taking in a deep breath, releasing it, refocusing on the present. As he refocused he realized Tsunagu was watching him with concern. It took a moment for him to consider before he offered a simple explanation.

"You can probably guess what her attitude towards mental health shit was."

Tsunagu nodded, not pressing any further than that.

"It will be something to revisit later then. For right now and following the court case, those will be helpful as a starting place. You can work through them at your own pace in whatever order you'd like. If you have any questions I'm more than happy to try and answer them, as are your teachers."

A nod in return. Katsuki eyed the books hesitantly before glancing back up, wondering if that was all they needed to talk about. Didn't look like it. He waited for Tsunagu to keep talking.

"I wanted to update you on what we know for the trial. I've spoken with Aizawa and he said you would be fine to have up to four of your classmates attend the trial, not including Izuku since he'll be present as a witness. Most of your teachers will be there to testify. There shouldn't be many other people. No recording will be allowed, and Naomasa will be present to help ensure everything goes smoothly. You'll be asked to take the stand, go over the list to confirm each item on it, confirm a few points for the prosecutor if needed, and then their lawyer will have a chance to ask you questions. Your parents will not be allowed to ask you any questions directly or speak to you."

Even with that caveat, Katsuki could tell that this was going to suck hardcore. He was going to fucking do it anyways. Still, he already knew that his mother was going to take her last chance to hurt him and she was going to make it count. His concern must've shown on his face, because Tsunagu quickly added on to what he'd said.

"To be clear, you can refuse to answer any questions. Even those asked by the prosecutor. Unless the judge tells you otherwise, which is highly unlikely. Simply respond saying you don't want to answer the question and that's the end of it."

That was somewhat comforting. Not a lot, since he knew himself and he knew he wasn't fucking backing down from a fight like that, but having the option was nice. He nodded again. There wasn't much he had to say on the matter. Besides, it seemed like Tsunagu still had something left to discuss. Now though, the other had grown a bit more unsure. Nervous? No. Hesitant, but not nervous. Guilty? Maybe. Why would he be guilty?

"Prior to the trial... I also want to discuss certain events that occurred during your internship. As it's entirely possible that they will come up during the court case. I'm not particularly concerned about the outcome for the case, the evidence is substantial to say the least, but it's better to be prepared."

Katsuki bit his lip. That was fair enough, and it made sense to talk it about it now. Didn't mean he wanted to though. His usual strategy for handling stuff like this was blowing the problem up or never mentioning it again. Neither were going to work here. At some point his gaze had fallen, staring at a blank spot on the couch. A slight shake of his head and he refocused on Tsunagu who had clearly been waiting for him to collect his thoughts. Alright. Words.

“It-.” Pause. Breathe. Okay. “It wasn’t that big of a deal. The hair stuff wasn’t fun, but you didn’t know about any of her shit. You didn’t really force me into it either. Not like she did.”

The unspoken question hung in the air. After a pause, Katsuki decided to answer it.

“I had the quirk restraints on at the time. She was livid because I wouldn’t change into the dumb fucking outfit she’d picked out for a dinner with her parents. It had long sleeves and gloves and was an all around shit idea but she wouldn’t listen to sense. My father even tried to reason with her on it, since even he saw how dangerous it was. No luck. So she grabbed clippers, pushed me into a chair, and went at it before I could react. Guess she was so frustrated she couldn’t make me look how she wanted that she just did whatever she could to control my appearance. I tried to move and she almost fucking took my eye out. She cut it short, way shorter than I like to keep it. Nicked me with the clippers a few times too. That was it though. It sucked, but it really wasn’t the worst thing she’s done.”

Glancing up told him, yep, that was definitely a guilty look. Katsuki stayed silent, offering only a slight shrug. It took a moment, but Tsunagu found his voice.

“Katsuki- I-.” Now it was Tsunagu’s turn to pause. He visibly collected himself before restarting. “Even if I didn’t physically force you into it, you were still clearly uncomfortable during the interaction and I should’ve paid more attention to that. I should’ve backed off, I didn’t, and for that I’m sorry.”

Another pause. Katsuki wanted interrupt but held himself back, waiting for Tsunagu to finish.

“Really, that applies to most of your internship. I got caught up in the narrative the media built around you, I didn’t think critically about what I was being told, nor did I think to ask you for your side of the story. I should’ve done better as a mentor, and I’m sorry that I didn’t.”

Katsuki’s knee-jerk reaction was to brush the apology off. He took his time to think it over instead.

“Alright.” That wasn’t quite right, but whatever, he was going with it. “Alright, so you didn’t handle my internship perfectly. Even so, I still learned more than I thought I did. I think it was important for me to know that was how other people saw me. Touching my hair messed with me a bit, I’ll admit that, but it wasn’t something I lost sleep over. It was just uncomfortable. It’s in the past now too.”

This time he didn't give Tsunagu a chance to protest.

"For the court case, I never even mentioned the hair shit to her. Most I said was that we had different personalities and styles. She extrapolated the rest between that and my mood. If she did somehow find out about the hair thing and put that together, even if they ask about it at the trial, I can comfortably redirect to what she did. If they ask about us not getting along initially, well, people change. A lot of shit has happened in my life since then. Shouldn't be much else that she can do with that."

Seconds ticked by, and Katsuki wondered if Tsunagu would try to press the point. In the end the other only nodded. Accepting Katsuki's acceptance of the apology and turning to look forward.

"That should work if either point comes up. She may try to exaggerate your mood after the internship, but it shouldn't change much."

So that was settled then. Silence fell over the two of them for a heartbeat. Tsunagu spoke again, a bit more relaxed now. The guilty look was mostly gone at least.

"Well, I suppose the only other thing I have to tell you is All-Might caught me up on what happened during my interview. Both reporters that harassed you have been arrested and are facing charges. To prevent anything like that from happening again, you'll be escorted by myself, Aizawa or another of your teachers for the entire day of hearing. Tomorrow you should get a more detailed brief that we can review together. For right now, did you have any questions about the case?"

The escort was to be expected. It would be annoying as fuck and made him feel weak for not being able to defend himself, but he got it. Given all the media attention it was important that he didn't defend himself. Any self-defensive move could be played as an attack. He thought over everything he knew so far, and realized he did have one question. One that Tsunagu was strangely qualified to help with.

"What am I supposed to wear for the trial?"

Tsunagu considered that for a moment.

"Dress however you feel most comfortable. Press will probably manage to get photos of you on your way into and out of the courthouse, so do keep that in mind, but otherwise it's up to you."

Hm. That left a lot of options. Katsuki absentmindedly lifted his hands from the books in his lap to spark them off, traces of sweat having gathered during the conversation. Which brought another question to mind.

“How long is it gonna last?”

A grimace. Yeah that wasn’t a good sign.

“If everything goes smoothly, a few hours. If they really stall the case and push for time, up to a full day.”

“Do you think I’ll be able to duck out to spark off every so often?”

From the frown it didn’t appear Tsunagu had considered his quirk, which was fair enough. Katsuki hadn’t even thought about it, and wouldn’t have if it wasn’t for all the issues today. He was used to just sparking off wherever and playing it off. People bitched at him about it, but he rarely got in trouble. A courthouse was different though, particularly when he was trying to not come across as aggressive. The rules on quirk use were incredibly strict, and there was no way he could spark off during the trial.

“We’ll do our best to make sure you can. It may be hard though, particularly if they stall for time while you’re on the stand. I know using a cloth to absorb the sweat isn’t ideal, but do you think it could work as a backup?”

Possible but risky. Basically anything that wasn’t specifically designed to handle nitroglycerin would be dangerous. A thought hit him.

“Could I wear my hero costume to the trial?” A second passed and he realized he should probably explain. “Minus weaponry, I mean. I designed it to be able to absorb and move around nitroglycerin, so I could still grab shit while I’m fighting. Usually the gloves move any excess to my bracers, but as long as I’m not trying to explode anything or sweating heavily then they should work on their own for about 24 hours. All the cloth in it can safely handle mild amounts too.”

It should work just fine even if the trial was stretched on. With it he could get away with not sparking off for the whole day if he needed to.

“Will you be comfortable in it for the entire trial? And will you be comfortable with having your role as a hero associated with this case?”

Fair questions, Katsuki considered both before replying.

“Yeah. Honestly, I think I’d be more comfortable in it than anything else. She hates it. I didn’t let her have any say the design. Plus everyone already knows who I am by this point. Between her and the kidnapping, this stuff’s gonna stick around for my hero career. Might as well fucking own it.”

Tsunagu nodded.

“Then I think that would be a lovely idea.”

With that settled, Katsuki felt confident about what was coming. He’d have tomorrow to prepare for the trial, and the day after he’d sit through whatever hell she threw at him, and then it’d be over. It almost felt unreal, like some weird dream. Like he’d suddenly awaken back in his bedroom to her screaming about something downstairs.

Yet here he was. Almost out of her grasp. Not in a dream, not in some fantasy world. Breathing. Moving on. Getting closer to that freedom. Only two days left.

The last leg of this journey was going to be a trainwreck. Katsuki couldn’t fucking wait.

Chapter End Notes

A quick but important note, I'm going largely off the manga for this chapter and this fic in general. The manga and anime have a weird divergence with Katsuki's internship. In the manga, Katsuki actually behaved fairly respectfully around Best Jeanist, and Best Jeanist never restrained/used his quirk on Katsuki. They annoyed/frustrated each other, but that was pretty much the extent of it. I think that's a vital difference, and I did want to clarify for this fic.

I also did want to note since I see a lot of misunderstandings about this, but Best Jeanist's quirk, Fiber Master, very specifically works best on denim. He can manipulate other fibers, even stuff like carbon steel fibers, but denim is easiest for him. It's the reason for his whole jean motif. So the reason he has all his side

kicks/Katsuki wearing jeans isn't just for aesthetic, but because it makes it that much easier for him to move them to safety or defend them during a fight. In hero work, that split second difference could mean life or death for an ally.

Reciprocation

Chapter Notes

Quick Trigger Warning: Being publicly outed/some homophobic language.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

As it so happened, Mitsuki Bakguou couldn't wait either.

Tsunagu woke up fully intending to have a semi-relaxing day. The media had been taken care of, Katsuki was safe, the court case was the next day. Everything should've moved along smoothly. All they needed to do was go over the brief so Katsuki would be prepared for the questions. That was it.

But fuck those plans apparently.

Breakfast had gone nicely. Actually the entire morning had been very pleasant. Maybe that should've been a warning sign. It was a little after 1 pm, and Tsunagu was sitting on the couch with Katsuki on the other side of it. Tsunagu had caught up on almost all his paperwork in the past two days, so now he was working through a novel that he'd been meaning to read. Initially Katsuki had been pushing through his worksheets, but he'd worked through his self-assigned workload by noon. Now he was reading the guide Tsunagu had gotten for him while taking notes.

Bzzt.

Bzzt. Bzzt. Bzzt.

Both of them glanced to their phones, which were now buzzing with incoming text messages. While Tsunagu had been expecting a few messages with the brief and other notes, that was scheduled for 2 pm. It also should have only been sent to him. He made eye contact with Katsuki. The teenager was aware something was wrong, but he hadn't checked the messages yet. It was like a web of tension had been spun in the room, and one wrong move was going to send everything crashing down.

Tsunagu spoke finally, reaching for his phone as he did so.

“Let me check first. If it’s bad, I’ll tell you.”

That got him a nod in reply. Katsuki still picked up his phone, but only to silence it before putting it back down. There were quite a few messages waiting on Tsunagu’s phone, none of which were from Detective Naomasa regarding the briefing. Instead all of them were from the group chat which was currently blowing up.

Kamni Woods: I know I haven’t been around much since the raid, since I’ve been busy and all that.

Kamni Woods: But uh, Mt. Lady just texted me and I think you all should check Channel 7.

Kamni Woods: It has to do with Katsuki

Present Mic: Tuning in now, isn’t Channel 7 one of the americanized conversative fear-mongering channels though?

Gang Orca: It is, but it’s still a popular one.

Gang Orca: Though honestly they shouldn’t have any issues with Katsuki?

Hawks: I’m out on patrol right now, keep me updated

Eraserhead: Oh of course she’s doing this.

Snipe: You’d really think she’d know when to stop, but I guess not.

Hawks: ?

Snipe: Long and the short of it is she’s doing another interview.

Snipe: It’s starting in five, they’re billin’ it as a “exposing the truth” sorta thing.

Eraserhead: @Best Jeanist

Eraserhead: Is Katsuki with you right now?

Oh, of course. Of course *that* channel would be the one to give her a voice. They already hated Tsunagu for being a top 5 pro-hero with a heavy interest in fashion and non-violent capture method. At the very least, while they were a highly watched channel the rest of the media didn't give them much attention. Tsunagu suspected a good number of their viewers watched it as a comedy channel.

Best Jeanist: Katsuki's here, his phone started blowing up at the same time mine did so I assume his classmates have seen it as well.

Best Jeanist: He hasn't looked at anything yet.

Best Jeanist: He's waiting on me to tell him what's going on.

Hawks: Maybe it'd be better to not let him know now?

Hawks: I mean like, wait till it's over before you tell him

Hawks: So we know exactly what this means.

Eraserhead: Katsuki's too smart for that.

Eraserhead: He probably already has fair guess as to what's going on

Eraserhead: Hiding things from him doesn't work.

Eraserhead: It just means in the future he won't trust you not to lie to him.

Eraserhead: Tell him what's going on, let us know how it goes.

Eraserhead: In the meantime we'll focus on seeing if there's any way to get the interview pulled or get a U.A. representative on site.

Best Jeanist: Will do.

Tsunagu grimaced as he looked up from his phone, glancing up to the teenager who was watching him. Wary red eyes and a careful mask in place keeping any real emotions concealed, emanating annoyance and aloofness. He tried to find the best way to break the news. This was the sort of thing that required a delicate touch.

"She's doing another interview then?"

Or not. Not worked too.

He sighed, tired, frustrated, and vaguely relieved he didn't have to break the news. That was all Katsuki needed to confirm his suspicions. That gaze fell to the phone sitting beside Katsuki on the couch, contemplating it.

"It's on Channel 7, one of the... more extreme channels. They're framing it as a conspiracy theory and last I heard it was starting shortly. Odds are it won't change much but..."

"She wouldn't have gone there if she didn't have a plan. There's plenty of shit she can say that might not affect the case but that I don't want the general public knowing."

Tsunagu nodded and Katsuki considered for another long moment before speaking again.

"I want to watch it."

There were a million and one reasons why that was a bad idea. It could potentially trigger another panic attack, it wasn't going to be anything good, it would only give her more of a chance to hurt Katsuki. He opened his mouth to protest, but Katsuki cut him off. Those eyes were looking at him now, that endless determination burning in them.

"I know it's a bad fucking idea. I know it's what she wants. I wanna watch it anyways. I'm done with backing down from her shit. I'll listen to whatever she has to say about me, and then I'll move the fuck on from it. I've been running from this fight for ages, and I'm done with it."

Some part of Tsunagu knew that he should still try to argue, but he couldn't make the words come out. Crimson eyes stopped them in their tracks. Katsuki had made up his mind and it wouldn't be changed. It was his choice in the end. So he gave another nod, silent but meaning so much and those eyes released him.

Faintly he was reminded of Aizawa's quirk, how his gaze pinned people down. It wasn't quite the same, but it was similar.

A heartbeat passed before Katsuki reached out and took the remote, turning on the TV and

changing the channel. Muting the commercials that were currently playing. Biting his lip Tsunagu made a quick choice. He shifted across the couch so he was now at the halfway point. An open offer. Katsuki eyed him for a moment before he shifted as well, slowly but surely moving until he was next to Tsunagu. There was a moment of hesitation and then Katsuki pressed into Tsunagu's side, leaning against him with his eyes still firmly fixed on the TV. Tsunagu wrapped one arm around him and reopened the messaging app with the other, his attention still largely focused on the teenager beside him.

Best Jeanist: He guessed it before I could say it.

Best Jeanist: We're going to watch it.

Snipe: You sure that's a good idea?

Snipe: Seems like it'll only tear him down.

Snipe: 'nd we can recap the broadcast afterwards for 'em

Best Jeanist: Not sure it's a good idea, but he wants to.

Best Jeanist: This is about control for her, she wants to control him anyway she can.

Best Jeanist: For Katsuki, I think he needs to watch it to prove to himself she can't.

Best Jeanist: I'm going to exit the chat until the interview is over, if there are any severe reactions I'll alert everyone here.

Eraserhead: Thank you Tsunagu.

Eraserhead: Best of luck.

Best Jeanist: We'll need it.

With that said and done Tsunagu put his phone away. There was a little timer in the corner of the TV counting down to the interview. Less than a minute. He gave Katsuki a very gentle squeeze that he hoped was reassuring and the teenager pressed closer to him for a moment.

Nothing good was going to come out of this, but Tsunagu was going to do his damndest to protect Katsuki anyways. No matter how bad it was.

It was bad.

Tsunagu had been expecting her to go off the deep end. He'd be expecting this to largely be wild accusations, unsubstantiated nonsense intended to paint Katsuki in the worst light possible. Unfortunately, Mitsuki Bakugou was smart enough to know that wouldn't hurt him.

When she'd arrived on stage, she'd been polite. Smiled sadly, a soft, formal appearance to her. Everything about her was designed to inspire pity, a picture of helplessness. Her husband couldn't appear she'd said, he was too distraught by everything going on. The first few minutes hadn't been bad. Instead, it had just been her talking about how stressful everything had been over the past few days. Tsunagu had been hopeful that maybe this wouldn't be an attack after all. That she had wised up and decided to try a different strategy. Then the anchor had asked about Katsuki's comment from the day prior.

"I've always tried so hard to be a good mother to him, but it's hard raising such a violent, villainous child. You know what I mean? Even when he told me he was sexually deviant, said that he didn't like women, that he liked boys instead, I tried so hard to overlook it. I think maybe I'm at fault for this a little bit, I should've nipped that attention-seeking behavior in the bud. I thought that if I played along with the whole gay thing he'd just grow out of it. I suppose not though, it didn't get him the reaction he wanted so he had to go pull something like this."

She shook her head sadly, as if what she had said was tragic and the anchor reached to pat her shoulder sympathetically. The anchor was making a homophobic comment in response to try and comfort her. Tsunagu couldn't be bothered to pay attention to it. Besides, it was about to go to a commercial break anyways.

All of his focus had shifted to Katsuki who had tensed up. His eyes were wide with shock, as he processed what had just happened. What she had just said. There was a lot of emotions that Tsunagu was expecting, a lot of reactions he was prepared for and a million speeches he had ready.

He wasn't expecting Katsuki to laugh.

Yet laugh Katsuki did. It wasn't exactly joyful, but it wasn't manic either. It was something between disbelief, relief and victory. Tsunagu could only watch in stunned silence until Katsuki finally regained himself enough to speak. When he looked up at his mentor, there was still a bit of a grin on his face.

"Sorry- ah." The teenager had to pause to catch his breath. "Sorry, I just can't believe that was her big plan. I mean, fuck, I'm not happy she outed me or anything, but whatever. It's not like I've

been trying to hide it or any shit like that. Just never been asked about it by anyone before.”

Another pause, his grin fading the slightest bit, eyes falling, nerves present but determination overruling them.

“I am that. Gay, I mean. Not like “sexually devious” or whatever the fuck she said. It’s not a big deal. Never even meant to come out to her about it, I just lost my temper when she was shouting some shit about how I would never get a wife. So I shouted back that I wasn’t planning to get a wife, I was gay.”

His voice got a little strained, trying to keep some kind of light, humorous confidence to it.

“That caught her off guard. For a moment I thought she was going to really lose it. Instead she just said ‘Well good. Then there’s still a chance I’ll be able to get a son who isn’t a total fucking disappointment’ then followed up with ‘Wait, no, nevermind, he’d need to be willing to date you.’ and stormed back to whatever she was doing. It was better than what I was expecting. I mean, she was still super shitty, but she never brought that up again. Dad would sometimes, reminding me how lucky I was to have parents that put up with that. It’s funny to see her taking pages outta his book now.”

Tsunagu was torn between laughing and crying. On one hand, he was glad that Katsuki didn’t really seem hurt by being forcibly outed since that could be a highly traumatic experience on its own. On the other, of course she would manage to turn him coming out into an insult. Instead of doing either, he just carefully pulled Katsuki into a proper hug. This at least he had some idea of how to handle. It took him a moment to remember where in his closet they were, but once he had all it took was a tug of his quirk to bring two of his scarves out.

He hadn’t worn either of them out before. It had been PR issues mostly, he’d been too nervous when he was younger, then he’d built up an image to maintain. Most of the time it slipped his mind, and oddly enough, he’d never been asked about his personal life in an interview. Usually anyone who wasn’t interested in his hero work was interested in his fashion work instead. The majority of the media liked him quite a bit since he was one of the few top ranked pro-heros who was friendly to most reporters.

Both scarves slide across the apartment and into his hand. Katsuki broke the hug to look at what Tsunagu had grabbed, pausing to take them in. They still had a bit of time before the interview would come back on. This station always had particularly long commercial breaks.

The first scarf was the classic rainbow flag. He’d gotten it on a trip to America during June. At the

time he'd been so nervous about buying it that it had been weeks before he'd unpacked it from his luggage. The second he'd been less scared about, having ordered it online on impulse. The design was fairly simple, with the purple, gray, white and black stripes making up the main part with a large heart at the center filled in with the two shades of green and that same black, gray and white. He wondered if Katsuki would know the second flag, the symbols weren't too common, but when the teenager looked back up at him there was understanding in his eyes. It was Tsunagu that spoke first still.

"I think I mentioned before that I'd never been interested in a romantic relationship?" A nod as Katsuki recalled it. There had been a lot going on that evening, and while he'd expected the question to come up at some point, this worked too. After a second, he decided it was only fair he tell his own story. "I figured out that I was asexual and aromantic quite young, there was a very helpful lesbian couple who lived next door that would watch me from time to time and I learned the terms from them. I've never formally told anyone but Kugo- Ah, Gang Orca. He asked me out during my second year, and I didn't want him to think I was turning him down because of his appearance. Most pro-heros just don't ask about that sort of thing, particularly towards the top rankings."

The commercial break was almost over, but Katsuki seemed a lot more relaxed now. The teenager managed a half-grin and a somewhat mischievous reply.

"I guess I'm just surprised you never accidentally outed yourself making a pun."

Suddenly Tsunagu was very glad that most of his face was covered by his turtleneck. He was definitely blushing just the slightest bit. Of course Katsuki caught on anyways and raised an eyebrow.

"...I may have had a few close calls during my younger hero years."

He was sure that if the interview didn't come back on, he would've been pressed for an embarrassing story. At the time he was actually relieved that the TV took back Katsuki's attention.

In hindsight, he would rather have listed every embarrassing moment he'd ever lived through.

Because as it turned out, forcibly outing her son on national television was only Mitsuki Bakugou's warmup. Her real plan unfolded during the main segment of the interview.

“There was this young boy in our neighborhood. He was my highschool friend’s kid, very sweet, dark hair and big round eyes. Always wanting to help others out. Katsuki and he were friends when they were younger.”

All traces of a good mood were gone from the room. Tsunagu was confused more than anything else. It was quite clear she was bringing up Izuku, but he and his mother were both testifying against her? Why would she turn to him of all people when trying to paint Katsuki in a bad light?

“Once Katsuki got that awful quirk of his, everything changed. He tortured that poor boy constantly. It was all I could do to keep Katsuki from murdering him.”

Several things hit Tsunagu at once. Katsuki had mentioned bullying Izuku when they were younger. It had been somewhat listed in the reports he’d read, though no details had been given. With what he currently knew, he was unsurprised that Katsuki had ended up a bully. It was common for children in abusive households to replicate that abuse as it was the only thing they knew. It would be a complicated topic to broach. However, Izuku seemed to still care for Katsuki quite deeply. Mitsuki didn’t know that part. Thinking things over, why would she? Katsuki wouldn’t have talked about any positive experiences with her, and since Aizawa had only recruited Midoyrias as witnesses after the court papers had been served, she wouldn’t know they were testifying against her.

None of that was helpful for Katsuki, who had frozen. Tsunagu had gone to turn the TV off, knowing that nothing of what was to come was going to be good. But Katsuki had stopped him, a pleading look in his eyes that Tsunagu couldn’t just ignore.

So they watched.

The picture she painted of Katsuki was horrific. She downplayed her own violence as a needed response to a child psychopath. While she never named Izuku, it was clear that this was almost all about him. About a poor boy who Katsuki had tormented without reason, rhythm or mercy. Each action, every word he’d said, all of it was played up to the maximum, encouraged by the anchor.

The worst part was that even without confirming it with Katsuki, Tsunagu knew all of this had actually happened. Which meant neither he nor UA could release a statement saying that it didn’t. They also couldn’t release a statement explaining that Katsuki’s actions had been motivated primarily by her abuse, and not the other way around, since they couldn’t legally discuss the case details.

By the time the interview was almost over, having reached its last commercial break, Katsuki was

almost a wreck. Tsunagu tried to find words, but there were none that he knew that could comfort this child, so instead he just wrapped him up in a side hug and held him close. How Katsuki was still holding himself together was beyond him. He just held him close and tried to support him as best he could, as Katsuki faced down his guilt, his pain, his mistakes.

In the end, it was two sentences that broke him. It had almost been over. Only a few minutes left on the clock.

“...You know I never saw proof, but after he’d revealed he was engaging in the gay lifestyle, I always wondered if he tried to make that poor boy do anything. I wouldn’t have put it past him.”

Up until that point, Katsuki’s eyes had been foggy, upset, lost in memories but that snapped him out of it. They went wide in shock and fear. Tears started to gather in the corners and then he was looking at Tsunagu who was also frozen.

Neither of them heard the last part of the interview. That had been more than Tsunagu could take and he’d turned it off just as they reached the goodbyes. There was silence for a few seconds before Katsuki spoke, voice weak.

“I didn’t- I never-. I wouldn’t have-.”

And Tsunagu already knew that Katsuki didn’t lie. He shushed the teenager as best he could, the other’s words turning into aborted sobs.

“It’s okay. I know you didn’t. No one who matters would think that you would do such a thing. They know you better than that.”

They would’ve stayed like that for a lot longer, but a ringing broke the silence.

It was Tsunagu’s phone.

He didn’t want to answer it, but he knew he couldn’t ignore it right now. Things were too delicate. When he picked it up, the number was one that he didn’t have saved, which threw him for a loop. Still, he clicked the Answer Call button.

“Hello! I’m sorry to bother you, I got this number from All-Might and I hope it’s right because he’s not too good with his phone normally and the first one he sent me was wrong which was weird because–”

“Izuku?” Was all that Tsunagu could respond with, totally thrown off by the boy’s peppy tone and rambling. Really, he seemed almost happy? But a deadly sort of happy. It sounded like he was either about to, or already had killed someone. Katsuki froze at the name, unsure of how to respond.

“Yes! Sorry, I should’ve introduced myself first. This is Izuku Midoriya, I was hoping I could speak to Kacchan for a moment? Normally I’d just call him but he wasn’t answering. I think he turned his phone off.”

Still somewhat in shock, Tsunagu turned to look at Katsuki, who had heard the question. There was a silence in the air before Katsuki held out a shaky hand. Without a word Tsunagu passed the phone over. Katsuki put it to his ear and took in a shaky breath. It was clear he intended to say something, but Izuku didn’t seem to need the greeting. Tsunagu could still hear the conversation clearly.

“Kacchan! I’m glad you’re there. I know we probably have a lot to talk about, but I’m in a little bit of a rush right now!”

There was a slight pause and it was then that Tsunagu realized he could hear background noise from Izuku’s end of the line. He was somewhere where there was lots of traffic. A city?

“I dunno if you saw it, but as our classmates discovered, your mom decided to do an interview again. I was pretty upset when I saw that, but I was a lot more upset when I discovered she was trying to use me to justify what she did. At this point she’s dragged me through the mud as some helpless victim she was trying to protect, and I’m not too happy about that. So halfway through her interview, I called All-Might who knew someone who knew someone that worked at the station. I told them that I had even more detailed information on the story and I would love to do an interview right after hers. I’m actually standing outside the station right now!”

Oh. That would explain the noise. Katsuki still couldn’t speak, but Izuku pressed on anyways, sounding a deadly sort of calm and happy.

“Anyways, they’ve offered to have me do an interview in five minutes! I’m very excited about it. Turns out that while our teachers can’t talk about what happened to you, I don’t even have a provisional license yet. While I’m not supposed to talk about any of *your* life experiences, I’m

perfectly fine to talk about *mine*. Given that she just decided to air out a lot of my life history on national TV, I would really like the chance to make sure everyone understands my perspective on all of it.”

This was a dangerous game and Tsunagu knew it. However, Izuku was technically right. Legally speaking he could talk about his experiences with the media so long as it was only his experiences. The case wouldn’t be hurt by it either. There was another pause, and then Izuku’s tone grew a little more serious.

“If you don’t want me to, I won’t Kacchan. You’ve already had a lot of secrets spilled today, and I get it if you wanna just try to ignore her. I know I fucked up on giving you a choice in the past. But if you’re okay with it, I want to set the record straight.”

For several long seconds, there was silence. Tsunagu thought Katsuki might look to him for advice, wasn’t sure what he would say if he did, wasn’t sure what he should say if he did. The point was moot though, because Katsuki’s eyes stayed down, looking at the couch until something in him was made up. When he spoke, his voice was tired. Cold? Not cold, but a strange neutral temperature. Flat. Quiet.

“Do whatever you want. I don’t own you.”

The other end of the phone line was silent.

“...Alright Kacchan. I’m going to come over afterwards if that’s okay?”

Katsuki gave a slight nod, and then seemed to realize that Izuku couldn’t see him, opening his mouth to give a verbal reply. Izuku didn’t need it.

“I’ll see you then. Bye Kacchan.”

There was silence in the room. Several beats passed before Tsunagu did the only thing he could think of, he turned back on the TV.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku, watching Mitsuki try to use his story against the person who he has risked his life for multiple times and admires more than basically anyone else:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBckCBgNf40>

As I mentioned before, these last few updates will be slower because these chapters are getting longer. I've got more that needs to happen in each for the scene to be complete. Next chapter is going to be Izuku's interview and the afterwards of him and Katsuki Talking Shit Out and then the chapter after that will encompass the whole court case. It's gonna be a hell of a ride so buckle up.

Also, Best Jeanist is Ace/Aro, these are just Facts.

Long Overdue

Chapter Notes

So for this chapter in particular, I really want to note that I am not sticking strictly to canon. There are additional events present/referenced that were entirely created by me alongside canon events. However, I think the core principles stay pretty true to canon, or at least my interpretation of it. Also, again, all this is going off of the manga, not the anime.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The station had already started hyping up the interview, the graphics were a bit scattered and phrasing a bit awkward. It was clearly all last minute, but it worked. From how they were framing everything, it seemed the station was under the impression Izuku was there to back up Mitsuki.

Now Tsunagu, despite everything that had happened over these past few days, didn't know that much about Izuku Midoriya. While he'd certainly gotten a sense of the boy's heroic nature, his compassion, his bravery, and how deeply the other cared for Katsuki there was still a lot he didn't know.

Given the tone Izuku had used, Tsunagu had expecting him to go out and start spitting fire. At this point it's what he would've done.

Izuku had a different plan. The boy was pissed off beyond belief, but he was more than angry; Izuku was *vengeful*. He was out for blood, and he was smart enough to know how to hit her where it hurts.

Anger wouldn't hurt Mitsuki Bakugou. Rage, accusations, fire, she could handle just fine. The people that watched these sorts of channels wouldn't be won over by anger either. They'd see it as a battle they could pick sides on and argue over endlessly.

So Izuku did the one thing he could that Katsuki couldn't. Wouldn't. The one thing that could really hurt her and get the world to see her as she was. The one response she wasn't used to dealing with.

He cried.

When the boy stepped out onto the stage he was already shaking. Tears were forming in the corners of his eyes. He was wearing his school uniform which only made him look younger. Everything about him screamed ‘protect me’ and for a moment Tsunagu was worried for him. He would’ve tried to interfere if he hadn’t overheard that phone call. Katsuki gave a humorless snort at Izuku’s appearance, somehow able to see through it.

The anchor was kind to him, it was impossible to be anything else. They spent the whole first minute with the mics off making sure Izuku was okay as he tearfully nodded. Finally the interview proper was started.

“Izuku, you’ve had a trying experience this week, huh?”

A nod and weak smile. The boy tried to compose himself.

“Y-Yeah. It’s been- It’s really been a lot. I mean the training camp getting attacked was bad enough but then everything else after. It’s just been so much happening all at once.”

That got him an encouraging grin from the anchor.

“I know you’re probably still very shaken up. We really appreciate you coming to help us tell the real story. It’s very brave of you, even when it’s clear you’re still scared of him.”

There was the set up he’d been waiting for. Without hesitation Izuku pounced. He let his eyes go wide, tears lingering in the corners but overridden. Ever so innocently he tilted his head to the side and replied, his voice a perfect blend of confusion, disbelief and curiosity.

“Why would I be scared of Kacchan?”

The blow hit perfectly, the anchor caught totally off-guard. Izuku didn’t give them any time to recover, going right into a shaking ramble.

“I could never be scared of Kacchan, he’s my classmate and my friend. I’m just nervous because I don’t know if she’s still somewhere around here. I mean, I asked at the front desk and they told me she had left right after her interview which is good but maybe she forgot something and doubled back or never actually left and she’s just hiding which doesn’t seem like something she’d do but I mean I didn’t think any of this was something she’d do.”

“Wait- Ah- Sorry. You mean you’re worried Mitsuki Bakugou is still at our station?”

A nervous nod accompanied by Izuku hunching inward just the slightest bit drove the point home. It took him a second to collect his breath, but then Izuku pressed on, clearly establishing why he was actually there.

“Yeah, s-sorry, I know it’s dumb that I’m still scared of her after all these years. Not to mention I’m on live TV so she couldn’t try anything, and I’m strong enough to take her in a fight I guess if she did try that. But it’s just that she’s hurt me and Kacchan so much, I mean-. It’s hard to let go of that I guess.”

After the anchor managed to recover their footing, they quickly jumped on that idea, hungry for the story unfolding.

“What do you mean by that? She hurt you?”

The look on Izuku’s face was that of a picture perfect victim. Like the face of a kicked puppy that had been digitally edited to make the eyes a bit shinier with a black and white color filter and some text slapped on to promote some animal rescue. His sad nod sold the whole thing before he even opened his mouth.

“In so m-many ways. It’s why I needed to come here today. I c-couldn’t let people believe her lies. I’m still scared of her, but after everything I- I really needed to be brave and let everyone know what she did. S-she took my friend from me for so long, she hurt him and lied to him, and I needed to make sure people knew the real story.”

He took in a deep breath, not allowing the anchor time to ask any more questions or redirect the interview.

“I’m the one she talked about in all those stories. Just in case anyone didn’t know. Most of those things all did sorta happen too, but she left out a lot of really important bits. I think she must think that I didn’t know. I mean, to be fair, I didn’t know about a lot of it and I really wish that I had because maybe I would’ve done something sooner and I could’ve stopped her before-”

Izuku had to cut himself then, carefully reaching up to wipe away his tears. Letting all his regret and sorrow show for the camera. Tsunagu could tell it wasn’t faked, none of this was, only put on

display to make sure everyone else saw it.

"Sorry. I-I ramble a lot when I get nervous. But what I was trying to say is s-she talked about me when she thought I couldn't hear. My quirk took a long time to come in, and so people thought I was quirkless. I'd hear her talking about it, talking about how upset my mom must be, and how much of a disappointment I was. How I was so weak, so fragile, so pathetic for w-wanting to be a hero anyways. She'd call me lots of names too. I don't really wanna r-repeat them here."

Those green eyes had glazed over a little, looking off into tragic memories. It took a moment for Izuku to keep going, his audience drawn in now.

"Kacchan started repeating it when we were kids. He didn't really get what a lot of it meant, and it was weird since he'd always just stated it as a fact. It'd hurt to hear, but I wouldn't say anything because I knew he wasn't trying to insult me, at least not at first. He was only saying what everyone else was saying, just not as pretty."

Izuku hesitated, considering his options for a moment before changing the direction of the conversation.

"You know, I've known Kacchan for as long as I can remember. We grew up together and our moms were friends, so he was always a part of my life. There was never a time where there wasn't Kacchan in my life. I still remember the first time I really saw him though."

At that, Izuku paused, his posture loosening for the first time. A fond smile peeking through the fear and sadness on his face.

"I couldn't have been more than three at the time. He didn't have his quirk yet. We were at a park with a couple of other kids, but I was off playing on my own with an All-Might figure that my mom had gotten me for my birthday. Everything was fine until a bigger kid came up to me. I actually don't know how old they were, but in my mind they were giant and they already had their quirk. It made their skin hard and spiky on their hands. They demanded I hand over the figure. When I refused they punched me and took it anyways."

Izuku let out a sigh, hand going up to rub at his cheek as he recalled the blow.

"I was so devastated I couldn't even yell for my mom. I just froze up, went totally quiet and still and cried as they were walking away with my toy. All I wanted was to go get up and try and fight

back but I couldn't get my body to move. Then suddenly there was a blur and Kacchan was punching them right in the face. He'd seen them walking away from me with my toy and he wasn't about to let it happen. It only lasted a minute, and he got a really nasty set of bruises, but he actually managed to win the fight. By this point the adults had seen what was going on and they all came over to yell at Kacchan for attacking someone, but he ignored them."

That fond smile grew just a little bit as Izuku remembered the moment. It sounded very fitting for what a young Katsuki would've done. Take on someone twice his size who had every advantage in the fight and still come out victorious in the end. Tsunagu glanced to the side to gauge the teenager's reaction, it seemed that Katsuki recalled the events of that day too, because he had a slight fond smile of his own.

A little part of Tsunagu's mind strayed back to the kidnapping, to Katsuki going straight after an adult who could kill him with a touch while surrounded.

He had always been this way then.

"I remember him standing above me while I was still frozen. When I didn't react, he pushed the toy into my lap 'n said that I needed to learn to fight back if I wanted to be a hero. After that, he stuck by me the entire day to make sure the kid didn't come back. I couldn't say anything because I was in a sort of haze, but he didn't mind. When it was time to go he walked me all the way to my mom to ensure he'd completed his mission, held my hand to make sure I didn't get lost and everything. My mom played along with it, thanking him for protecting me. She promised that she could handle it from there and he went to go home. That was when I finally snapped out of it, I wiggled out of her grip and ran after him to give him a hug and thank him for saving me."

Tsuangu had taken to half watching Izuku on the screen and half watching Katsuki's reactions to his side. Izuku's movements were telegraphed, genuine but played up for the camera, and fairly predictable. Katsuki's reactions were the opposite. Quiet, reserved, but reflecting similar emotions. That fond smile was easier to see now, and though it was laden with guilt and regret, it was still there. On the screen Izuku continued.

"He shrugged me off and said that was what a hero was supposed to do, so of course he had to save me. Like there had never been any other option for him. Then my mom had caught up with me and I had to go, but I never forgot that. All-Might was the first hero I knew about, but Kacchan was the first hero I knew. Even when we were so young, so new to everything in the world, he was a hero at his core."

Now Izuku's expression turned sad again, remorse clear. Katsuki's own expression had darkened to match it. He knew what came next in this story. Izuku sighed again. His shoulders slumped and his eyes went to the floor.

"Then we got older. He got his quirk. I don't know when his mom started to hit him, maybe she was doing it the whole time, but not long after that Kacchan start to hit others. He never did serious damage, even when we were little he had pretty good control of his strength, but hitting people was his solution to everything. It didn't matter if it was something small like accidentally littering or the bigger kids trying to pick on us. If he thought someone had done something wrong then he'd fight 'em."

The anchor was actually leaning in a little now, the studio crowd having gone quiet to hear this tale.

"At first I didn't understand what had happened. He got angry with me a lot of the time, he hated whenever someone tried to help him, and he'd hit people over anything. For a little while I thought he had just decided to be mean. I couldn't make heads or tails of it. All I wanted was my friend back. Kacchan was the strongest, bravest, most heroic person I'd ever met and it felt like this should be impossible. I looked up to him so much but once he got mean I almost gave up on him."

As Izuku spoke, his voice got quieter and quieter, tears starting to collect at the corners of his eyes again.

"Everything changed when I saw her hit him for the first time. I'd only come by to give her something from my mom and neither of them knew I was there. He'd gotten 94/100 on his test instead a 100 and so she smacked him upside the head hard. I already knew that was bad, but then she started yelling at him for ages and ages about it. I got so scared I ran away. I didn't know what to do. Adults weren't supposed to be able to hit you, that was something only a villain would do. But parents weren't supposed to be villains."

It left a silence in the room. Guilt was radiating out from the anchor now, you could feel it coming from every member of the studio audience and probably a good chunk of the off-camera crew. Now that the story had been reframed, they were in the wrong for having hosted a villain. What Izuku had done had worked just as he intended it to. He had to take a long pause, but eventually started again.

"You find out as you get older that sometimes villains aren't as easy to spot as you think they should be. That's what I learned from her. Sometimes they're hiding right in front of you the whole time."

It was a hard lesson to learn, neither of them should've been forced to learn it so young.

"After that, once I understood what was going on, it was like all of the sudden I was watching things from the outside. Now I wasn't just hearing Kacchan yell at me for something small, now I was hearing her behind his words. I can't say it was fun with him saying that sort of stuff to me, it still upset me from time to time, but honestly, once you know the truth it's hard to care."

He paused to consider his words carefully, now more thoughtful than sad. A reflective tone to everything.

"Like I said before, every story she told was technically true. Aside from whatever the hell she was trying to imply about him sexually assaulting me, that's entirely made up crap. He yelled at me a lot, called me a lot of names, we got into a lot of fights that were pretty one sided. But she left out two things. First, I never heard him say something about me that I hadn't heard her say first."

Izuku had to pause again, clearly searching for the right phrasing.

"The other thing she didn't mention was that he never made me stay. It's not an excuse, but I knew what I was getting into when I was hanging around him. I mean sure some part of me hoped that he was going to wake up and decide we were best friends again, but I'm not dumb. I followed him around knowing full well we were going to get into another fight. That he was probably going to call me names, and that I was going to freeze and not be able to say anything in response. At some point I kinda got used to it. Kacchan talked rough with everyone, that was just something he did even when he was trying to be nice. It stopped bothering me once I knew what was happening."

He ended that point with a shrug, giving the camera a half-hearted smile. It seemed that the anchor had finally found their voice again.

"This- This has been very informative. But I do need to ask, if you knew things were bad, why is it you didn't speak up sooner? It doesn't strike you as odd at all that this was only taken care of after he was kidnapped?"

Izuku's gaze fell, eyes filling with remorse, old guilt clear for anyone to see. It took him a moment before he was able to answer.

"Its- sorry." He had to stop to consider everything, taking a few seconds to brush the tears away from the corners of his eyes. Then Izuku was able to keep going.

"I did try. I never knew how bad things got, only that she hit him sometimes and that she said nasty

things about both of us. The first time I tried was when I'd come over to get help on one of our homework assignments. He's always been such a good tutor and even when he was pissed at me he'd still help me through stuff. So I went over, and I guess she didn't know that I was there. She'd only just gotten home and he went out of the room to talk to her. I don't know what happened before she hit him, but I heard it, ran in and yelled at her for it. I told her to leave him alone, but she just tried to talk down to me. Tried to tell me it was okay somehow. Kacchan got really upset with me for getting involved. He made me leave. The next day he showed up with a few nasty bruises on his arms and he didn't talk to me for a week."

There was a sad sigh after that. It was clear that these weren't easy memories to recount.

"That taught me pretty quickly that I shouldn't try to do anything about it myself. Everything I found online told me that I needed to tell a teacher. I did just that, I told our homeroom teacher who I never really liked but I was sure that he would care about this. He may not have liked me, but he liked Kacchan a lot."

Izuku hesitated after that. His expression was quiet, defeated. It took him time to find his words once more.

"Our middle school sucked for a lot of reasons. The teachers didn't care about us. They didn't care if someone was getting bullied, and as I found out, they didn't care if someone was getting abused. I don't know exactly what happened. What I do know is Kacchan got called into a meeting with his mom. It lasted maybe 15 minutes at most, and when they left Kacchan looked really upset. That was Friday afternoon. When he got back on Monday he was pretty beat up. Everyone else assumed he'd gotten into a fight but he was snippy if anyone asked about it."

That would explain the guilt Izuku was projecting in his every twitch and movement. Beside Tsunagu on the couch Katsuki had curled up on himself. The meeting had come up during the questioning. As Aizawa had found out, said meeting hadn't even been recorded by the middle school and no note had been made on Katsuki's record. All that had been done was the teacher had called Katsuki and his mother in as he was required to, laughed off the suggestion that someone as tough as Katsuki was being hurt, and sent them on their way. The teacher had since retired and hadn't left enough contact information for them to track him down. Katsuki didn't think that he'd remember the enough of the meeting for it to be worth their time.

Tsunagu had a lot of emotions and thoughts regarding all of that, but Izuku had started to speak again.

"I don't know how he found out that I was the one who told, but he did. He was furious with me for it. I mean, he never explicitly said that was why, but he picked on me every day for a solid month. It hurt, but I just took it because I felt like the whole thing was my fault. He did kinda have a right

to be mad at me too, I didn't talk to him or let him know I was going to talk to a teacher. Even if I was trying to do the right thing, it ended up hurting him more than if I'd said nothing."

Another pause, a second shrug of sorts from Izuku.

"After that, well... I won't say I gave up because I didn't. I kept watching for any sort of proof that I could take to someone above a teacher. I tried to talk to him about it a few times, but that would make him madder than normal at me. But for the most part, there wasn't anything I could do. As far as I could tell it got better as we got older. I guess he just got better at hiding it instead. It drove me crazy, when I still had this sense of something being wrong but I couldn't do anything about it. I hated it so much. I hate her so much for what she did to him. To me. In the end, all I could actually do was stick around him and keep trying to reach out. Keep waiting for someone who could actually do something about the situation."

His tone was sad, remorseful, but not gone. It wasn't the tone of someone who'd lost the war, but the tone of someone who knew they could've won it sooner.

"I wish I'd spoken up when I got to U.A., but I still didn't have any proof. I was scared that it'd be a repeat of what happened before. I was considering trying to talk to my teachers anyways after I'd gotten to know them a bit better... but then that awful Sports Festival happened. I wasn't sure that I could trust them with Kacchan anymore. Not after that. It sucked, and since then they've proven they can do better."

He took another pause. The interview's allotted time was close to over and he knew it. Izuku carefully gathered his thoughts again.

"You know, the whole hero job is about saving people. Kacchan is the one person who made me doubt if I could become a hero. Really doubt it. Not because of anything he said to me, but because it didn't matter what I did, I've never been able to save him. I couldn't save him from the villains at our training camp, I couldn't save him from the slime villain when we were in our last year of middle school, and I couldn't save him from her. All I could do was try, and it was never enough. Usually my attempts just got him more hurt."

There was quiet in the studio for a long moment. The green haired boy let out a long sigh before pulling himself back to a semi-composed state.

"I guess what I'm trying to say here is, I made my choice. Kacchan was a jerk to me, that's true. But he never tried to get me to stay. He never asked me to follow after him or to try and help him. If anything, he did whatever he could to get to me to go away. I was the one who decided I wanted

to stick around him. I made the choice to keep trying to save him, even when it was a bad idea for me to do so. Just like I made the choice to come out here today, because I needed people to understand he has never been the villain of my story. She was. It was always her, and to think she would dare come out here, that she would try to hurt Kacchan like that. That she would take her last chance to hurt him and try to use me to do it.”

Tears glistened at the corners of Izuku’s eyes again. It was a wonder the boy wasn’t dehydrated by now.

“... Well I can’t say me trying to help has done much good in the past, but I couldn’t stand by and let her do that. I’ve never been good at standing by when it comes to Kacchan.”

From there the wrap up was fairly quick. Izuku said a polite goodbye and ducked off, still trying to wipe tears from his eyes. Tsunagu didn’t even have to look at his phone to know that it’d be a clusterfuck. He decided to ignore it to focus on Katsuki, who was still curled up, seeming somewhat shell-shocked.

There was silence in the room for a minute or two. Finally, Tsunagu broke it, unable to stay quiet any longer even if he didn’t know what to say.

“How are you feeling?”

Several emotions flitted across Katsuki’s face and after several aborted attempts to respond, he gave a half-hearted shrug. Tsunagu moved his other arm to wrap around Katsuki and squeezed his shoulders gently.

“Fair enough.”

In all honesty, Tsunagu wasn’t even sure how he was feeling about all of this. There was definitely some relief, Izuku going on the station directly after her would almost certainly change the entire narrative. Since Izuku had done a good job in how he told his story, it was unlikely that anyone else would need to speak on the matter. Still, he wished that the issue had never become public in the first place. It wasn’t fair for Katsuki to have so much of his young life put on display like that, and it wasn’t fair for Izuku to have had to tell so much of his own story either.

The silence kept up for a few more minutes before Katuski found his words again. His voice was close to wobbly, unsure, hesitant.

“The- he.” Silence again as Katsuki reordered his thoughts. “Izuku broke his arm for the first time when, fuck, we musta been like three.”

After a moment of thinking it over, Katsuki nodded to confirm that age. Now his words came easier, stronger.

“I don’t think he even fucking remembers it. He was always a fragile kid, but we’d been playing heroes. I was pretending to be stuck in a tree so he would have to come save me, and he was halfway up the trunk. All it took was a second where he lost his grip and the next thing I knew he was on the ground bawling.”

A long pause followed that. The missing pieces of the story started to click into place for Tsunagu, and he finished the story.

“She blamed you for it, didn’t she?”

Katsuki nodded again, and there was guilt on his face too. A different sort of guilt than before. The kind of guilt that someone else beat into you, guilt from the choices you didn’t get to make rather than the choices you did. A few seconds passed before he managed to speak again.

“It wasn’t just her. Auntie Inko got upset with me too. She was just scared and obviously she didn’t do anything but-.”

He didn’t need to say anything more. While Tsunagu was sure that Inko was a lovely woman who almost certainly did a lot of good for Katsuki whether she realized it or not, when Katsuki’s base was already so unstable it only took one mistake.

The silence returned after that, Tsunagu just kept Katsuki wrapped up in a hug and the other accepted it. Time slide by the two of them, flowing in uneven pulses.

A knock sounded at the door.

It took a moment, but Tsunagu found the willpower to release Katsuki. He wasn’t exactly sure what time it was, still, it seemed like it shouldn’t have been long enough for Izuku to make his way

here. Before he could stand to get the door Katsuki was already halfway across the room.

Tsunagu was only just able to stand up by the time Katsuki opened the door. His vantage point was a little awkward, but he could make out the fluffy green hair peeking over Katsuki's shoulder.

The tension in the air was thick enough not even a knife could cut it. You'd need to break out a chainsaw to have any hope of making a dent. Seconds ticked by, and Tsunagu was sure that there was something he should be doing, something he should be saying.

In the end, Izuku spoke first.

"Can I come in Kacchan?"

To put it lightly, Katsuki had been having one hell of a day. Some traitorous part of his mind was wondering if joining the league of villains was still an option. Because sure, it went against everything he believed in, but if he did then 'blowing problems up so I don't have to deal with them' because a valid route for dealing with his emotions again.

He would never actually do it. Honestly though that should've been their sales pitch instead of that bullshit about being restrained. Like, 'hey kid, come with us and you'll never have to deal with your emotional problems in a healthy way ever again!'. Obviously he wouldn't have joined them, but it would've made a way more tempting offer.

Alright, enough of that train of thought, refocus on the situation at hand. It took a lot of self-control, but Katsuki bullied his brain back into the present. He was sitting near the headrest while Izuku sat at the end of his bed. Tsunagu was out in the living room probably fretting. The two of them needed to talk privately though, and he understood that.

Still now that they were here, now that Katsuki had committed himself to having this conversation, he had no idea where to start. How do you even try to talk about something like this?

Izuku seemed to have lost a lot of his nerve now that the two of them were face to face too. His eyes were downcast. There was still guilt on his face, and it was driving Katsuki mad. The longer he saw it there, the more he wanted to do something about it, even though he didn't know what to do.

Despite what people liked to say about Katsuki, he wasn't that brash. He didn't run into fights without knowing what his plan was, and he didn't do that with social situations either. Even if his plan was absolute shit, self-destructive or not accomplishing the goal most people thought he should be accomplishing, he still had one. Izuku had always been the exception to that. It didn't matter if it was a training exercise, a conversation, something about Izuku took away Katsuki's ability to think things through. Today was no different.

"I'm sorry."

It wasn't enough. It wasn't enough. It wasn't enough, but it was what he had. Saying those two words felt wrong, not because he didn't mean them because he *did*, he meant them with every bone in his body, but the scale of them felt wrong. So he kept talking after that. Letting words tumble out as he closed his eyes, unable to even look at Izuku.

"I'm sorry, for everything. I mean- god. Even if it was your choice to stick around, it was my choice to do that shit. Fuck Izuku- I-. It was still my fault, my actions, I should've known better and-"

It took him a moment to realize he was getting close to hyperventilating. With all the willpower he had left he forced himself to take deep breaths. To regain control of himself. He still couldn't open his eyes.

Alright.

This wasn't helpful. Shit-talking himself wasn't going to make Izuku feel any better. Instead it would just make Izuku feel like he needed to defend Katsuki from himself and Izuku had already done quite enough defending today. Refocus.

"I-" Breathe. In-out. In-out. In-out. "I'm sorry." This time he was able to say it more calmly. Stronger. Not a plea now, but a promise.

"I was going through a lot of shit, but that didn't make taking it out on you okay. You didn't deserve to put up with that." He needed to get that across first. He needed Izuku to understand that.

Breathe.

“I’ve said it before, but I need you to hear me this time. Even, even if you aren’t going to stop trying, I need you to listen. It’s not your job to save me. It never was and it never will be.”

Katsuki had to pause there. Breathe a little more so he could say the next part as he meant it.

“You couldn’t ever save me because I wouldn’t let you. I was too scared. I was too scared of being weak. I was too scared of her, and of leaving behind what I knew. Most of all though I was too scared of you getting hurt or killed and it being all my fault for not being strong enough.”

It took a lot to say that out loud, something Katsuki had been trying very desperately to hide. Even from himself. Now that it was out there though, he found the rest of the words coming out easily.

“It happened all the time when we were kids, you’d be trying to follow me and you’d slip and fall because *of course you would*. Then you’d be all scraped up and it was my fault for not watching you better. My fault for not catching you. You were always so fragile, you’d cry at anything but you still kept chasing after me and it was *terrifying*. ”

He had to take a second to breathe again, even now feeling the panic surge back up.

“It doesn’t make what I did okay, but Izuku, do you know what it was like being in class and hearing you say you were going to take the U.A. entrance exam? Just to try it? When you could barely run four laps in PE? It has the highest injury rate of any pro-hero school entrance exam, and they’ve had near deaths in the past. They don’t even have staff out on the field to keep people safe if something goes wrong, they just rely on the other students to interfere!”

Even now he could feel that same overwhelming fear he’d felt that day. How his vision had gone red out of sheer terror and how the only thought in his mind was making sure Izuku didn’t try and take that test. He didn’t care what he said, he didn’t care if it had crossed lines, none of that mattered to him. All he could see was Izuku getting killed in that testing arena and it being all Katsuki’s fault. Because he hadn’t been able to stop Izuku from following him, yet again.

Breathe.

“Then the slime villain....”

This was somehow even harder to talk about. It took gritting his teeth together and forcing himself to breath around them for Katsuki to summon the will power needed to press on.

“The official report on that incident is wrong.”

Breathe.

“It says that I was fighting him off for six and a half minutes, it was a little over ten. Nobody called to report it. The pros weren’t alerted until I finally tried to use my quirk to fight him. It was awful. I couldn’t breathe, I could feel him touching me everywhere, everything hurt so fucking badly. But I never panicked. Even when there were all these pro-heroes around me shouting stuff but not one of them even tried to talk to me. Not one of them tried to tell me what I should do, where I should try to move to. Fuck, no one even tried to tell me it was going to be okay. Didn’t matter, I held the fuck on and fought him off as best I could. It hurt like hell, but I wasn’t scared.”

It was true. It had been painful, and sure he’d been scared as fuck in the aftermath, but in the heat of things he hadn’t had room in his head to panic. In combat situations everything came easily and rationally. Even when fighting against eight villains he hadn’t had a lick of fear. The fear came later.

“I wasn’t scared until you got involved. Until you decided to run into that situation, with no combat experience, no weapons, quirkless and with no plan whatsoever. That’s when I panicked, because all of the sudden, if I wasn’t strong enough I was going to get you killed too. There was nothing I could do to save you.”

He’d lived through that moment a thousand times in nightmares. Again and again and again. His mom had made sure to drill that point home too, that Izuku almost died and it was his fault. If he had been stronger, if he had known better, if he had been better than Izuku wouldn’t have needed to try and save him.

“I didn’t know what to do. I gave up. I realized there wasn’t a single thing I could do to stop you from following me, so I decided to just try and ignore you in hopes that might fix things. Then you actually started training, and you had a quirk all of the sudden...”

They’d talked about that a little bit at least. Izuku already knew what he had thought about the idea that all this time Izuku had been lying to him about being quirkless.

“It still-” Breathe. “I’m not trying to say what I did was okay. I was an asshole. I took shit out on you when I should’ve done something about it, and I fucking hurt you. I can’t take that back. I just-” Breathe. “I just need you to understand *why*. It wasn’t your fault, it wasn’t because you weren’t trying hard enough or any shit like that. I never let you save me. That’s why you couldn’t.” Just keep breathing.

“I’m sorry I pushed you away when you were trying to help. I’m sorry I hurt you for things that weren’t your fault. I’m still not... good at any of this shit. I’m probably going to be a fucking mess for awhile. I’m not going to tell you that I’m never going to snap at you again or never be an asshole again because I don’t make promises unless I know I can keep them.”

In. Out. In. Out.

“I can promise I’m going to get better though. I’m not letting myself fall into that cycle again.”

Silence fell over the room. Katsuki still couldn’t bring himself to look at Izuku. A full minute must’ve passed by before Izuku finally spoke.

“I broke both my legs and one of my arms at the entrance exam.”

A pause, Katsuki tensed at that memory. He still remembered hearing about it second hand. The overwhelming guilt that he hadn’t stopped it from happening.

“I don’t regret it, just like I don’t regret going after the slime villain, and I don’t regret sticking around you. But it was still a really dumb choice. Even after 10 months of training with All-Might himself, I wasn’t ready for it. If I’d gone in there with no real training at all, quirkless and with a support item or two at best like I was originally planning...”

Izuku let out a shaky laugh, they both knew exactly how that would’ve ended up.

“I always got so frustrated with you for not letting me help you. I mean, you were a dick but I was convinced that if I just kept trying, if I just stuck it out for long enough, if I just kept throwing myself at the problem, then somehow it would be okay in the end.”

Yep, sounded like Izuku’s life plan in a nutshell. What sucked was somehow that kept going well for him. Maybe the universe liked him more or something.

“I’m starting to realize that maybe ‘throw yourself at the problem blindly with no regard for the consequences’ isn’t the best life plan. I’ve already messed up my arms pretty badly and I don’t think it’s going to keep working out for me. Not to mention I’m pretty sure my mom’s going to die of a heart attack if I keep this up.”

That got a snort out of Katsuki, god, poor Auntie Inko. She had always tried so hard to strike that balance between believing in Izuku and not letting him get killed.

“And... I probably should’ve listened when you said no.”

Red eyes flickered open to look at Izuku in shock. His first instinct was to protest, but Izuku gave him a half smile and pressed the point, green eyes holding his gaze steadily like they hadn’t for a long time.

“You’re right. You can’t save someone who doesn’t want to be saved. It wasn’t my job to save you, and it wasn’t my job to follow you around our whole childhood either when you made it pretty clear you didn’t want me around. I wouldn’t have ever given up on you, but I shouldn’t have kept pushing when it was clear you didn’t want my help. Particularly when there wasn’t anything that I could do to make a difference. I acted without thinking and as a result I made your life harder because you had to deal with me on top of everything else.”

Izuku sighed, dropping his eyes to stare at the bed sheets.

“I can’t say I regret trying, but I regret how I went about it. All in all though, we were both kids in shitty situations where there weren’t any easy answers. I was a kid who didn’t know when to stop or how to take no for an answer even when it put myself or others in danger. You were a kid who didn’t know how to handle his anger or fear and hurt others as a result. We both made mistakes, because that’s what kids do.”

A rather large part of Katsuki wanted to interject that it was completely unfair to compare their mistakes. That at least Izuku had been trying to do something good, at least he had been trying to help. He stayed quiet and let Izuku finish.

“So if you’re going to be working at being better, I’m going to too. I can’t promise I’m not going to pull dumb stuff like that again, but I can promise that I’m going to try to be less reckless. I’m going to work on developing a better combat style that doesn’t involve breaking my bones, and I’m going to work on listening when people tell me no. I know all of this isn’t going to magically go away,

it's going to be really awkward for awhile, and like you said it'll be messy and we'll probably make mistakes again. But... I still want to be your friend... if you want to be mine?"

Those hopeful, piercing, endlessly optimistic green eyes moved back to look up at him, a hesitant smile on Izuku's face. For so long, that gaze had hurt Katsuki. Because he didn't think he could be whatever Izuku saw, he didn't deserve to be looked at like Izuku looked at him.

But he couldn't control Izuku. Not anymore than Izuku could control him. He couldn't make Izuku's choices for him, and he couldn't make Izuku stop looking at him like that. What he could do was make his own choices. He could become someone who did deserve it.

"It's going to be such a fucking disaster." It wasn't a yes, but Izuku had always known how to hear what he wasn't saying. A bright grin split across his freckled face, with those green eyes taking on a mischievous sparkle.

"Everything was already a disaster, now at least it'll be more fun. We make one hell of a team, I'm pretty sure my mom said that once when we were kids."

"She said we were a team sent from hell after I let you cut my hair with those old kiddie scissors and then we knocked over the fridge trying to reach the top shelf."

"Oh. Right."

A few seconds passed before both of them broke down laughing. Katsuki remembered that day vividly, and at the time all of those actions had made perfect sense. He caught his breath, sobering up a little as he recalled how he had yelled at Izuku for the whole thing a day later. It stung, and he felt this wasn't how it was all supposed to go. Again he let his eyes find Izuku who was still trying to recover his breath.

There was so much he wanted to say, so much he would need to learn how to say. Izuku caught his eye and smiled at him, understanding. Somehow that was how it had always been between the two of them. Knowing everything the other wanted to say and none of it at the same time. After a beat or two, Izuku spoke up.

"It's okay Kacchan. We'll figure it all out. We've got plenty of time."

A pause, a bit of a flush forming on Izuku's face in embarrassment.

"It's not like I was perfect either. You know, I was talking with my mom about... everything, when we were doing the statements for Aizawa-sensei, right? She reminded me of a few childhood memories that I'd forgotten about, and well, honestly hearing them made me realize that I got a little stalkery at times."

If that wasn't the fucking understatement of the year. Katsuki couldn't help but let out a bark of laughter that sent Izuku into a full on blush.

"Oh, a little, huh? Did she remind you about the time I woke up to you in my house, in my room, holding my hand, *at 2 AM?*"

That got Izuku to bury his now tomato red face in his hands, groaning loudly.

"I apologized for that! It wasn't my fault that my mom had to drop me off because of an emergency, then I didn't want to wake you up when your dad said I could stay in your room and I got curious about whether or not your palms were still making nitroglycerin while you were sleeping!"

A raised eyebrow was Katsuki's only response which set Izuku off into an energetic ramble. The whole thing was so familiar, so comfortable, Katsuki couldn't have stopped the grin that split his face even if he'd wanted to. It didn't make any sense. Really, it should've been harder than this. There should still be so much tension, so much pain and fear, regrets and guilt.

Then again, when had they ever made sense? The two of them were different as day and night, and yet, here they were. It was as if they were unable to be apart. Izuku had always been a constant in Katsuki's life, for better or for worse. Even if there was so much that they were supposed to be, so much weighing on them when they were still so young, they had each other. No matter what.

"Come on, I've gotta go talk with Tsunagu about the questions for tomorrow. That and we all need to eat lunch, I'm pretty sure it's almost 3."

As Katsuki spoke he swung his legs off the bed and hopped to his feet, reaching the foot of the bed where Izuku was sitting in a single stride. Today had taken everything he had and more, but Izuku always pushed him further. He gathered up all of his worn determination and offered Izuku his hand to help the other teenager up from the bed.

It took a few heartbeats for Izuku to react. Somehow, it was the longest moment of Katsuki's life so far, and that was really saying something given these past few days. A blinding smile split that freckled face as scarred fingers reached out to take his. Izuku hopped off the bed, but didn't let go of Katsuki's hand after. He squeezed a little tighter instead, and Katsuki couldn't find it within himself to pull away. Even though he was looking towards the door now, he could feel those green eyes burning into him. A few more seconds ticked by as the two of them stood together. Silence engulfing them before Izuku finally broke it.

"Ready when you are Kacchan."

Katsuki looked back, meeting that burning gaze with his own. His lips curled up into a grin and overdue words came to him at last.

"I'm ready now 'Zuku, I promise."

With that he started forward again, Izuku's hand still held in his. Katsuki didn't know what the hell was going to happen tomorrow. Odds are it wasn't going to be fun or pretty. They would get through it anyways. The two of them always did.

Chapter End Notes

Izuku canonically, literally formed a Katsuki Bakugou Protection Squad that he was the leader of. There's a million tangents I could go off of about these two and their beautiful disaster of a friendship, but instead I'm just going to leave it at that.

Coming up, the court case.

Home

Chapter Notes

Alright, so here we are at the court case! This is the last proper chapter for this story, however there will eventually a sort of epilogue with little drabbles set at various points in the future, and I do have plans for future stories in this series, though they will be shorter.

For right now though, please enjoy like 20k of my various headcanons for these hell children. Also a huge shout out to [MTKiseki](#) and Skittini for betaing this monster of a chapter for me!

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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Katsuki awoke the next morning, there was a weight on him. Or rather, two weights. Pinning him in place.

His first thought was to panic and blow whatever it was off of him. Common sense told him that was a bad idea. Not to mention, despite feeling very strongly that he *should* panic, his body was actually quite relaxed. Comfortable with the weights, as if they were meant to be there.

Slowly, Katsuki forced his eyes to open. In front of him was a wall. The wall was not the same color as his bedroom wall. Something was wrong here.

Wait, no, the wall was the right color, wasn't it? The past few days caught up with him all at once, slamming into him like a freight train. Right. This was his new bedroom.

Katsuki wondered how long it would take until he stopped being confused when he woke up. Hopefully it'd be soon, because he had almost panicked about the color of the bedroom wall three times now. His brain helpfully supplied him with a passage from the kidnapping aftermath survival guide, something about how new surroundings could be harder to adjust to. Hm. Maybe he could stick a note or a poster on the wall.

The weight on his upper back shifted a bit, demanding Katsuki's attention. Really that should have been an alarming experience, particularly when coupled with the realization that the second weight, the one on his leg, was obviously someone else's leg. Which strongly implied that he was being spooned by someone.

His body protested again, refusing his attempt to panic. Belatedly, Katsuki realized that his own hand was holding onto the weight- an arm- on his upper back.

Had it been anyone else, he would've panicked. Honestly had it been anyone else, this situation would have never occurred. Katsuki twisted his head so he could take in the entire scene. A scarred hand was held in his own, green hair tickled Katsuki's jaw, a freckled face pressed into his neck, a lean chest curved over a broad back, and one leg over both of his. The nerd was still fast asleep, not bothered in the slightest by Katsuki's movements.

They'd stayed up late last night talking in quiet tones, recalling childhood stories and catching up on all the little things they'd missed in their hostility. It'd been... nice. Katsuki was pretty sure they hadn't meant to fall asleep together, Izuku was originally going to take the other spare bedroom.

Neither of them was good at sticking to a plan when the other was involved.

This happened all the time when they were younger. The two of them always gravitated towards each other, regardless of how hard they tried to pull away. Katsuki distinctly recalled the two of them separating after a heated argument when they were young, falling asleep on either side of the room. Only to wake up wrapped around each other with neither knowing how they'd gotten there.

Katsuki let his head fall back onto the pillow so he could look at the alarm clock on the nightstand. 6 AM. A little late for him. He preferred to be up by 5 AM, but he didn't normally let himself go to bed later than 9 PM. They only needed to be up by 6:30 to get ready for the trial today anyways.

Now that left Katsuki with a few options — he could shake Izuku off and go shower early. Alternatively, he could probably slip out from Izuku's grip without waking him and go shower early in peace. Or... Really there was no reason for him to get ready early. It wasn't like he was looking forward to the trial. Getting to the courthouse early was pretty low on his list of 'things he wanted to do today'. A list that didn't exist, and never would because his motivation was at an all time low. All Katsuki wanted to do today was pretend he didn't exist.

Right now, that was the most appealing option. Katsuki closed his eyes again, slowing down his breathing to match the long, slow, breaths coming from behind him. It didn't work exactly. He didn't fall back asleep.

Instead, he allowed himself to drift, warm, comfortable, wrapped up in his first friend's arms. It was what he imagined meditation was supposed to feel like. Usually, his mind was racing at a mile

a minute, even when things weren't going wrong he was always still thinking about what was next. Where he was going and how he was going to get there.

Not here though. Here he allowed himself to not think. Not worry, not plan, not be.

It was nice.

He opened his eyes again when the clock read 6:29 AM on the dot. Not that he'd been keeping track of time. Instead it was a guttural instinct that drove him. His competitive spirit alerting him his alarm was about to go off, and he needed to be awake to beat it.

What? Katsuki was who he was, and he wasn't ashamed to admit that he'd never been beaten by an alarm. If anything, he was proud of it.

Letting the pleasant fuzzy sensation drain from his tired limbs, Katsuki stretched out to snag his phone to turn off the alarm before it could ring. Just as he did every morning. Behind him Izuku grumbled a little, his hand tightening on Katsuki's. Katsuki almost pulled Izuku out of the bed with him on impulse, it would've been pretty funny, but he stopped himself at the last second. Izuku's quirk was still rather unpredictable and he didn't trust him not to activate it by mistake. Not destroying the apartment was probably the smarter idea when they had somewhere to be in an hour.

So instead Katsuki slid himself out of Izuku's grip, standing up to stretch out his muscles. He felt both refreshed and tired down to his core. It was a sort of tired that he was unused to dealing with. Usually, motivation was the last thing Katsuki needed; if anything, he needed less drive. Today though, even forcing himself out of bed was a trying experience.

God, this was going to be a long day.

Izuku seemed to have noticed that his pillow had left the bed, shifting around under the covers unhappily but still not awake. A light rap at the door didn't do much to stir him either.

"We're almost up," Katsuki called out, leaning over to give Izuku a prod in the shoulder. The other teenager yelped as he started awake, but thankfully didn't activate his quirk. A light chuckle outside the door confirmed he'd been heard. With that taken care of, Katsuki left a half-awake Izuku lying on the bed while he went to shower.

As an afterthought, he checked his hands over after stepping into the bathroom. The bedroom was a cool enough that he wasn't too worried about sweating during his sleep, but it never hurt to be safe. Thankfully it seemed the same luck he'd been afforded when they were children had held up, both hands were perfectly dry. Izuku had always run cold, something about poor circulation. Maybe that was why he always clung onto Katsuki like a heat-leech. Although, Katuski would be the first to admit that it was pleasant to not worry about heat causing him to sweat when he was holding Izuku's hand.

Showering was a quick task, as was getting dressed. Katsuki had neatly laid out his hero costume the night before after a lot of thought. He'd seriously considered wearing the gloves alone. Obviously he was leaving off the bracers, and he would need to remove the mask on the stand anyways. However, his combat gloves were too distinctive. It'd raise questions if he was wearing them without the rest of his costume, and Katsuki didn't want anyone else catching on to his quirk's constant production. The media had enough ammo against him already.

For the time being, he tucked the gloves and his mask into one of the pouches on his knee. The other was usually filled with supplies, but today only held blank capsules for his gloves. If nothing else, he'd be able to refill his grenades later today.

It took a moment for Katsuki to brace himself, but he finally forced himself to bring his eyes up to take in his reflection.

God, he looked really fucking tired.

That wouldn't do at all. While he usually didn't do much makeup, a bit of eyeliner before he put on his mask was all, today was different. Luckily, he'd thought to bring his supplies to camp, which meant it was all still in his backpack. It took him about ten minutes to get rid of the dark circles under his eyes, faint eyeliner carefully painted on, a few light touches of foundation, and the slightest bit of blush on top to make everything look natural. He could still tell he was exhausted, but it'd keep everyone else from noticing. The photos would look better this way too.

Feeling a bit more confident, Katsuki's eyes fell to the faint but noticeable marks around his arms. Oh. Right. He'd forgotten about the burns. His self-inflicted wounds been hidden by the long sleeves of his school uniform, but in his hero costume, they were practically highlighted. The burns had at least healed over enough that they weren't hand-shaped. Katsuki bit his lip and considered his options. Covering them up properly would take awhile, the makeup might rub off against his shirt too.

He'd need to throw on a jacket or something then, at least until he was actually in the courthouse. There was no fucking way Katsuki was going to give the media any ammo to support the stupid theory that he'd been kidnapped by the hero commission or whatever dumbass shit was going

around. Today was supposed to be chilly anyways. A jacket would look a little odd, but not totally out of place.

Nothing he could do about it here. Katsuki focused on tidying up the bathroom instead, cleaning off his brushes, tucking everything back in his case, and returning the case to its hidden pouch in his backpack.

After checking his appearance once more in the mirror and deeming himself as ready as he was going to get, Katsuki left the sanctuary of the bathroom to join Tsunagu and Izuku out in kitchen.

Tsunagu had already started on cooking breakfast. Izuku was leaning against the counter, looking a bit awkward but holding polite conversation regardless. Said polite conversation dropped when Katsuki entered the room. Two sets of green eyes locked onto the burns, one gaze alarmed and the other regretful. Katsuki didn't meet either. He had much more important things to look at. Like the kettle. Which he could use to make tea. Yes, that was what he was doing and what he had been intending to do when he walked into the kitchen.

"Kacchan..."

It was a question, but not a demand for answers. Izuku could guess what happened. He knew what burns from Katsuki's explosions looked like, and exactly how fast Katsuki healed from them. Putting two and two together wasn't hard.

"Freaked out the first time she was on. Didn't do it on purpose."

His eyes were still firmly on the kettle he was filling up, but he could feel the air move before strong arms wrapped around him. Silence filled the kitchen for a few moments. Izuku communicated everything through the hug before releasing him. There wasn't much either of them could do about it now.

Breakfast flew by after that. Before Katsuki knew it, it was almost time to leave for the courthouse. Izuku was hurriedly changing into a fresh school uniform and trying desperately to fix his hair. Since Katsuki had packed his backpack the night before all he needed was something to cover the burn marks on his arms. Unfortunately he quickly realized that he didn't have any of his jackets. It was summer, so Tsunagu and Aizawa hadn't thought to grab one. There'd been no need for one at camp, and his hero costume's winter jacket was at school.

Katsuki was about to ask Tsunagu if he had a spare jacket in his size when his eyes fell on a certain rainbow object that had been left out on the coffee table.

The scarf was large and long, though not too heavy. If he wrapped it right... Well he'd never been ashamed of who he was, what a way to make sure the rest of the world got the message.

While he'd paused to consider it, Tsunagu had noticed where Katsuki was looking. The older man was wearing a low collared version of his hero costume, as he'd be required to show his face while testifying. Katsuki was pretty sure he'd been planning to wear the rose scarf again for everything else. It was still hanging on the rack by the door after all. Plans changed.

"You'd be more than welcome to wear it. I've got a few others that would work just as well if you'd rather something that match your color scheme a bit more."

His voice was soft, not pushing Katsuki one way or another. It was nice, but unnecessary. Rainbows went with anything after all. Two strides and the soft fabric was in his hands. Bright, joyful colors screaming 'fuck you, I am who I am' would stand out nicely against the black of his costume. Another stride and he was in front of Tsunagu, holding out the scarf.

"It'll look perfect. I don't wear scarves too often though."

It took a moment for Tsunagu to process his words, eyes widening minutely then softening. Without the usual high collar, Katsuki could see the soft grin when his former mentor figured out his unspoken request. The scarf was delicately taken from his hands, and he spun around without prompting.

As the soft fabric wrapped around his shoulders, Katsuki felt his eyes flutter closed. Tsunagu was careful in his work, methodically weaving the scarf so it covered the burn marks without rubbing against them. Once he had finished tucking the scarf in place, Katsuki felt the fabric shift and settle. He wiggled his shoulders to test his range of movement, pleasantly surprised to find the marks stayed covered. Katsuki's hand moved down to his knee pouch, snagging his mask. He didn't need to say anything this time.

Tsunagu's hands were gentle as they deftly slid the mask into place, careful to smooth his hair down so it wasn't caught in the tie. The flares unfolded on their own, but were delicately smoothed out.

Reopening his eyes, they were drawn to his reflection in the window. The details were fuzzy, but he could see a dark silhouette. Sharp edges, imposing posture, proud red eyes made ever stronger by the seemingly soft rainbow wrapped around his shoulders. When he grinned, the figure in the window grinned back at him. Sharp teeth on display, as much a warning as it was a reassurance. Katsuki glanced over his shoulder to see Tsunagu was grinning too.

“Thanks.”

“Of course, it’s a good look on you.”

A bang came from the other room, shattering the moment. Huffing a sigh, Katsuki rolled his eyes and went to check on Izuku. Unsurprisingly, the other boy had managed to trip over his own feet getting dressed. It only took a minute for Katuski to wrestle him into the remaining parts of his outfit. His hair was a lost cause, but that wasn’t anything new.

By the time the two of them left the room together, Tsunagu was already waiting by the door. He’d put on a scarf of his own to match Katsuki’s, the purple and shades of gray framing his face nicely, with the green striped heart covering his mouth. Izuku’s eyes lit up in recognition, but he didn’t comment. They had places to be right now.

The courthouse was thankfully not too far from the apartment. It only took the car twenty minutes to arrive. Unfortunately, the press had been lying in waiting for them.

Police were present and doing their best to keep people back, but there was only so much they could do in the face of ravenous reporters. Tsunagu had stepped out first, using his jacket to block the bright lights as best he could. Camera flashes started going wild as Katsuki slipped from the car, Izuku right behind him. It took everything Katsuki had to not shield his face. He didn’t come here to hide, but *fuck*, this shit was seizure inducing.

Pressing on with his eyes forcibly forward was harder than Katsuki thought it’d be. Being blinded by bright lights was nothing new for him. His own explosions prepared him for that much, but the spastic nature of the lights coupled with hundreds of voices shouting his name, talking over each other, pulling his focus every which way wasn’t something he knew how to handle. Behind him, he felt Izuku stumble, instinctively reaching out to catch the other teenager. It took him half a second to steady his friend before they were moving again, but of course the reporters went nuts anyways. Did these people not have anything better to do with their lives?

Two more steps and Katsuki could feel the headache forming in the base of his skull. His eyes rebelled against him, squeezing themselves shut in a futile effort to block out the overwhelming

stimulus.

The lights stopped.

Katsuki could still hear the shouting, but it was muffled. Blinking, his eyes took a second to adjust to the new shade surrounding him and Izuku.

Why did everything look red and soft?

For a heartbeat, Katsuki lept to the worst possible conclusion. Villain attack. Given that Tsunagu had just relaxed in front of him, that seemed unlikely.

Another step forward. Wait. Oh duh. Katsuki didn't need to look up at the young man who'd just reached Tsunagu to know whose feathers were surrounding him. Hawks had been making the news quite a bit lately, of course Katsuki knew him. He just hadn't expected him here of all places.

With broad red feathers protecting them, the journey to the courthouse was no longer like trying to get through a 2011 rave with a lighting technician high on bath salts. The feathers moved fluidly with them, allowing them to make their way to the imposing double doors quickly.

Once they were inside, Katsuki let out a breath of relief. Izuku full on slumped against the closed doorway. The feathers that had shielded them slid away, pulling themselves back into a wing formation around Hawks. Hawks himself was grinning brightly at Tsunagu, almost bouncing on his heels as he explained something.

What Katsuki meant to do was catch his breath, thank the pro-hero for helping them because fuck that was almost worse than getting kidnapped (at least he was allowed to explode people kidnapping him), and find out how long they had until the court case started. He didn't get the chance for any of that. Instead he looked up to see painfully familiar watery green eyes fixed on him.

Now it was his turn to slump as he was wrapped up in a crushing embrace.

Inko Midoriya didn't have a strength quirk, but she held him so tight he feared he might shatter. If not from the force of her hug, then from the emotion behind it. The pain, guilt, and regret radiated off her in pulsing waves, making Katsuki's stomach twist into a tight knot. He didn't try to escape

her hug no matter how much her emotions overwhelmed him. She was the only person he'd *always* let hug him without a fight. After all she'd done for him, all his shit that she'd put up with without ever raising a hand. All the times she'd waited patiently for him to calm down, sometimes for an hour or longer, until he relented and talked things out. All the times he'd shown up on her doorstep, refusing to say a word and she'd let him in anyways. Auntie Inko had earned that right.

She had been the only adult he'd seriously considered asking for help. If she hadn't been such close friends with his mother, he would've gone through with it. As it stood, Auntie Inko had never had many friends, and his own mother was (had been?) her closest companion after her husband left. Katsuki had refused to be the reason she lost that friendship. He'd refused to take away something that made her happy. Even now, all he wanted was for her to stop feeling bad about the situation. None of it was her fault. If anything, she was the reason he was here now.

There was no way for him to convey all that with words, but he wanted to so badly. Eventually he was released from her hug. When she pulled back, her eyes were still watery, her face wrinkled, but she had a weak smile on her lips. Her hands cupped his face softly, and if Katsuki lowered himself into her touch, well that was his fucking business. Anything to make her feel better about all of this. To make her understand this wasn't her fault.

"I know dear. Izuku and I, well we had a long talk about everything. I know you didn't want me to know, and I know I probably couldn't have changed anything. I'll still be blaming myself for it for awhile, some things you just need to feel bad about."

It wasn't what he wanted to hear, but it was enough for now. As long as she knew. It would be okay in the end. All he could do was nod. She understood. His head was pulled down so she could press a kiss to his forehead before she'd rounded on her son.

From her expression, Katsuki was 99% sure that Izuku had not asked his mother's permission before going on national TV. Despite his stuttered apologies, the green haired teenager was herded off for a proper scolding and so she could fix his hair.

Katsuki took a moment to inspect the hallway, which had far more people than he'd expected. Tsunagu and Hawks had paused their conversation to watch him and Auntie Inko; it seemed they'd also caught the attention of his teachers who were further down. He could see several other pro-heroes trying to pretend that they hadn't been or currently weren't watching him. Why were there so many of them here anyways? His teachers he could understand. Sort of. But Hawks? Gang Orca? Kamui Woods? Hell, he was pretty sure that was Edgeshot behind Snipe.

Regardless of the why, all eyes were on him now. He felt his shoulders tense slightly, feeling defensive even though he knew he shouldn't. Before those emotions could take hold, a red blur shot into him, almost knocking him off his feet.

Thank god he'd put his gloves on in the car.

Eijirou's sunny smile filled his vision, blocking everything else out. He was getting hugged an awful lot today. Not that Katsuki was complaining as his friend's arms wrapped around his shoulders. Eijirou's hugs were warm, sturdy and protective. Everything he needed right now. When he was finally released, Katsuki was pulled into a second hug. This hug was brief, awkward and clumsy. When his crimson eyes met brown and blue, he grinned anyways. Physical contact wasn't natural for Shouto either, and the thought behind it made the hug comforting regardless of poor execution.

While he'd considered asking Mina and Denki, Katsuki had ended just inviting the two people he'd already somewhat explained things to. It took some of the pressure off him, and he trusted both of them to not spill anything on accident. Everyone else he could tell on his own time.

"Ten minutes until we're supposed to head in."

Good to know. Eijirou slipped to Katsuki's right side while Shouto took to his left. The two of them flanking him felt silly at best. He was literally in a courthouse hallway chock-full of pro heroes. Although, the eyes on him didn't feel judgemental anymore, so he allowed it without comment. Ten minutes then.

First things first, he stepped towards where Tsunagu was standing, glancing up to see if there was anything he needed to be doing. Didn't look like it. His eyes drifted to Hawks, who still had a bright grin on his face. Before he could ask, the winged hero offered an explanation.

"Me, Edgeshot, Orca, 'n Woodsy are here as the security detail." A single raised eyebrow got him a laugh. "I know, I know. It seems dumb, but you're technically high risk. There's also mandatory security levels for cases based on the number and rank of pros testifying. Even though there's a whole flock looking out for you, protocol says they don't count if they're a part of the case."

Seemed like a waste, but it explained most of the pros hanging around. It wasn't entirely unreasonable either; basically any other case with a high risk victim, a top 10 pro hero and several other pro-heros testifying would justify a heavy security detail. Katsuki nodded before remembering his prior goal.

"Thanks for blocking the assholes outside. I was expecting some press, but I didn't think people were going to lose their damn minds."

Shouto gave a sympathetic wince. Right, being the No. 2's son meant he dealt with a lot of media attention. Tsunagu nodded in solemn agreement while Hawks let out another light laugh, wings flicking in amusement.

"No problem kid, the media's worse than half the villains I deal with these days. I'm just lucky none of the reporters can keep up with me. Makes ditchin' em easy."

That lightened the mood a bit. Hawks was infamous for avoiding the press unless forced into interviews. His agency's excuse was how busy he was, but everyone knew he just didn't want to deal with the dramatics. Tsunagu sighed.

"I do understand the importance of a free press; the media is a vital part of our criminal justice system and brave reporters are the lifeblood of uncovering corruption. However, the flagrant disregard for basic human decency often leaves me appalled."

All of them could agree with that. After a beat of silence, Hawks suddenly straightened. His head tilted as he listened to his earpiece, making everyone else tense up. Seconds ticked by until he finally refocused on the people in front of him after a quick 'Roger that' to the person on the other end of the line. That smile wasn't bright anymore; it had more teeth to it. A dangerously sharp edge. While it didn't make Katsuki nervous, he knew damn well that smile wasn't for him, it wasn't a comforting sight either.

"Sorry 'bout that. Just heard from Edgeshot that the... opposing legal team is arriving shortly. They gotta come through the hallway, so we're going to move the party until it's time for the trial."

Well that didn't help group tension. Weirdly enough, Katuski found himself the most relaxed out of everyone in earshot. It seemed that the whole hallway had gotten wind of the new arrivals and nobody was pleased about it. What had the rest of them been expecting? The whole point of the court case was that his parents had to be here and face a legal decision. Fucking whatever.

Okay, maybe relaxed wasn't the right word. More like a calm acceptance of his impending death.

Katuski's eyes were still on Hawks, who had paused to talk into his earpiece again. Hm. Something else was up. Now the winged hero's grin faded all together as he turned to Tsunagu with lips pursed.

"Looks like they need you in the courtroom for last minute paperwork. Aizawa will meet you there."

For several seconds, Tsunagu looked like he would straight up refuse. A very childish part of Katsuki wished he would. He stamped that part down, reminding himself that he was a force of fucking nature who could handle his own shit.

Besides, Shouto and Eijirou clearly weren't going anywhere.

Hawks seemed to sense the refusal and quickly started offering reassurances.

"Hey, it'll be fine. We've only got like 8 minutes max until the trial starts, and there's already a sideroom ready so they can't get near him. I'll stick by Katsuki the whole time, and uh-" It took a moment for Hawks to scan who was nearby and not doing anything, but he made up his mind before gesturing to someone further down the hallway. "Kugo and Snipe can come with us too just to be safe. Neither of them need to do anything before the case."

That seem to satisfy Tsunagu as he gave a reluctant nod. Katsuki was put off by them talking about him like he wasn't here, but it wasn't worth picking a fight over. Instead he met Tsunagu's eyes when the other turned to him and gave a nod of his own. He'd be fine. There wasn't any need for a goodbye or words of caution, it was 8 minutes for fuck's sake, so as soon as Kugo and Snipe had made their way to the group Tsunagu ducked off to deal with whatever had come up.

The three teenagers were lead into a small side room. Said room lacked windows, and for a long minute, they all stood in silence.

Alright, fuck this. Pulling out his phone Katsuki decided to check in on the class chat to pass the time. He hadn't even glanced at it since shit had gone down yesterday. Ugh. Probably worth it to read the backlog to find out how much people saw.

Jirou: Alright, who's ready for some bad fucking news?

Sero: Absolutely none of us, but it's probably better if we hear it anyways.

Ashido: ^

Jirou: Fair enough.

Jirou: Channel 7's running another interview with Katsuki's mom.

Jirou: It starts in 5.

Kaminari: ...

Kaminari: So I know you aren't lying, but like, could you pretend that you were for a minute.

Jirou: Nope.

Jirou: At least the channel's pretty well known for being shit.

Todoroki: I'm unfamiliar with that station, I assume it's a news channel?

Uraraka: It's a "news" channel

Asui: While it frames itself as a news channel, it has heavily sensationalized and biased reporting, usually with a strong conversative edge.

Jirou: Looks like they're going for a conspiracy theory slant.

Jirou: @Katsuki, @Kirishima, @Midoriya

Jirou: I've tried messaging Katsuki privately but he isn't answering me.

Kirishima: Shit.

Kirishima: I'm going to try and get in contact with him.

Midoriya: I'll text Aizawa-sensei and make sure the school knows about what's happening.

Kirishima: No luck, he's not responding to me either.

Ashdio: I think we can assume he knows then.

Uraraka: Okay I know Aizawa said we “aren’t supposed to talk to the media” and “you can’t attack civilians even if they deserve it” but like

Uraraka: At some point we have grounds to assume someone is at risk of harm if we don’t act.

Uraraka: And I’m quickly running out of fucks to give about the consequences.

Midoriya: Good news, Aizawa’s in contact with Jeanist and Kacchan is okay.

Midoriya: I think he’s just silenced his phone to deal with it privately.

Kaminari: Maybe it won’t be awful.

Kaminari: She might make a fool out of herself on national TV

Uraraka: Fair point but I still wanna fight her.

Jirou: Not much to do beyond wait and see.

The chat had gone quiet for a bit after that.

Yaoyorozu: I’m catching up on the situation now

Yaoyorozu: Has the interview started?

Sero: Yeah, so far it’s all been pretty tame.

Sero: Maybe she’s just trying to do damage control?

Sero: Oh god fucking dammit

Yaoyorozu: ?

Uraraka: What the actual fuck.

Uraraka: I'm going to kill her.

Ashido: Same!!!

Yaoyorozu: What happened?

Asui: Mitsuki Bakugou decided it was her place to publicly declare Katsuki gay in a rather ignorant and bigoted manner.

Asui: I am unsure as to whether or not he is actually gay

Asui: I am making my way to Uraraka's house now to make sure she doesn't attempt murder

Ashido: Why

Uraraka: Mina gets it!!

Yaoyorozu: Oh.

Jirou: I could also use someone here if I'm being honest.

Sero: Denki's out. I'm over with him and Mina.

Sero: Neither of them are taking this well.

Yaoyorozu: Send me your address, I can be there shortly.

Jirou: Thank you.

Jirou: Sorry, just. If this is what she's starting with.

Jirou: I don't trust myself with the rest of this.

Yaoyorozu: It's no trouble, it's better to not face these sorts of things alone.

Ashido: Oh shit.

Ashido: @Kirishima

Ashido: Where are you?

Kirishima: Home.

Kirishima: My moms are here with me.

Kirishima: I'm okay.

Ashido: You sure?

Ashido: Denki can't use his phone right now, but he says he can hold back long enough for us to take the train if you need us.

Kirishima: Yeah, I'm sure.

Kirishima: It's not fun, but I know Katsuki's got Jeanist with him right now so that's helping.

The commercial break was filled with chatter about people switching locations. After it would've ended, everyone had gone quiet, likely out of shock at the direction she took the interview in. Katsuki scrolled until he finally found where some of the worst stories had been told.

Ashido: Is this

Ashido: Did these things actually happen?

Ashido: I mean, Katuski and Izuku don't get along, but she's making this up right?

Yaoyorozu: As much as I hate to say it.

Yaoyorozu: The details she's giving are highly specific.

Yaoyorozu: She could face charges for pure fabrication, twisting details and giving bad opinions is one thing, but this would be another.

Asui: I hate to believe anything she's saying, but I must admit this doesn't come off as a lie to me either.

Ashido: Blasty's not like that though. I mean, he can be an asshole, but he's not this bad.

Ashido: Like she's saying he physically attacked him.

Ashido: UA wouldn't have let in someone with that on their record.

Asui: That would only apply if it was reported.

Asui: If Izuku didn't speak up then it wouldn't have been on his record.

Kirishima: I don't buy it.

Kirishima: I mean, I don't think she's lying.

Kirishima: But she's not telling the whole truth either.

Kirishima: Maybe Katsuki did do these things, but there's gotta be more to it than that.

Kirishima: I mean for fucks sake, Izuku is the first person to defend Katsuki in any situation.

Kirishima: He wouldn't do that if Katsuki was the person she's making him out to be.

Kirishima: I mean you could probably make me sound like a pretty bad person too if you cherry picked every mean thing I've ever said to someone, took out the context and read the results without adding in anything else.

Sero: Kiri's got a point, even if she's not straight up lying we also don't know the context for a lot of these things.

Sero: I'm pretty suspicious of a lot of these stories

Sero: Like she just said when they were 10, Katsuki blasted Izuku twice in one week and left him with serious burns.

Sero: Why would Izuku's mom let him keep hanging out with someone who seriously hurt him unless there was more going on?

Tokoyami: I must agree, it seems to me that she is being deceitful even though her words are not false in nature.

Todoroki: I don't know much about how true these stories are

Todoroki: I can't say I understand what happened between them other then there was a lot of it

Todoroki: But I do know that Izuku often refers to Katsuki as his childhood friend when we're

talking in private

Todoroki: He, perhaps more than anyone else, believes Katsuki is a good person.

Todoroki: Even if all of these events are true, Izuku was the one who experienced them, and I trust his judgement a lot more than I'd trust the woman whose dedicated herself to making Katsuki's life a living hell.

Midoriya: Well that sounds like my cue.

Midoriya: Thank you Shouto, it means a lot to me that you guys trust my judgement and didn't rush to conclusions.

Asui: Are you okay Izuku? I can't imagine this is easy on you.

Midoriya: Yep :)

Midoriya: I'm working on something right now that I'm very excited for.

Midoriya: I can't say exactly what it is yet because I need to call one more person, but I wanted to make sure to put a few things in here first.

Sero: Okay I'm a little scared by that, but go ahead.

Midoriya: First, these things did all occur, though she's exaggerated a lot of things like how much I was hurt and Kacchan's mannerisms.

Midoriya: Second, there's more to almost every one of these stories.

Midoriya: I can't go through every single one, but as a rule of thumb you can assume she actively encouraged his behavior at the time, Katsuki had a secondary reason for his actions, and/or I had provoked him more than she lets on and his reaction wasn't entirely unreasonable.

Midoriya: The blasting me twice in one week is the perfect example actually

Midoriya: Yes, Kacchan hit me with a serious blast twice in one week.

Midoriya: But he hit me the first time because we were crossing the street when a car came barrelling at us.

Midoriya: The blast was just enough to knock me out of the way after I froze up.

Midoriya: I was mildly injured by it, but he didn't have another option and it saved my life.

Midoriya: The second time he wasn't even trying to hit me.

Midoriya: I had gone to find him at ah old quarry he practiced at because I wanted to thank him for

saving me earlier in the week.

Midoriya: He didn't even know I was there and I accidentally stepped in the way of his blast trying to get his attention.

Midoriya: I got a few burns from it, but it's incredibly unfair to blame that on him

Midoriya: I can't think of any time he's really blasted me with the intent to hurt me outside of training.

Midoriya: He was still a dick to me a lot of time, but it's way more complicated than she's making it out to be.

Midoriya: Our past isn't pretty, and neither of us were perfect during it.

Midoriya: But that's up to us to deal with, and nobody else.

Ashido: I guess it's a bit of a shock to find out he used to be way more of an asshole, but we weren't there for any of that so if you don't want any of us getting involved, we don't have any right to.

Ashido: Besides, he's not like that now.

Kirishima: I'm sorry but

Kirishima: What she just implied

Kirishima: Katsuki, he didn't, that was made-up, right?

Kirishima: He would never

Midoriya: Oh she did fucking not

Midoriya: Okay, disregard what I said about all of these stories being true

Midoriya: That was an absolute fucking lie

Midoriya: He's never even looked at me like that

Midoriya: Sorry, I need to go

Midoriya: Don't change the channel though.

Yaoyorozu: Wait

Yaoyorozu: What does that mean?

Yaoyorozu: Midoriya, you know Aizawa's ban on talking to the media still stands

Yaoyorozu: Right

Yaoyorozu: Izuku?

Uraraka: Oh fuck yeah

Sero: I mean, we've clearly established by this point that Izuku doesn't even let the law or broken bones stand between him and Katsuki.

Sero: A ban Aizawa issued yesterday in regards to a different situation isn't going to mean shit.

Sero: At this point I'm just hoping he's not going to physically attack her on live TV

Uraraka: I'm hoping he does

Sero: If he does it on TV there's evidence, witnesses, and the pros will have to show up and stop him

Uraraka: Okay that's a fair concern

Ashido: Bold of you to assume there's any pros left who would stop him.

Jirou: Well I don't think that's his plan either way

Jirou: Station just announced there's a surprise follow-up interview

Uraraka: That's not exactly what I wanted, but I'll take it.

Katsuki couldn't help but smile a bit as he read through his classmates reacting to Izuku's interview. The fact that all of them were willing to stand by him, even after having heard some of the worst shit he'd done in his life. It meant a lot. There wasn't a lot posted today, mostly just well wishes. He checked the corner of his phone. 3 minutes left. Should be enough time to update 'em. Maybe lighten the mood a bit.

Katsuki: Hey fuckers

Katsuki: Only got a minute before we've got to get today's shit show started

Katsuki: Regarding yesterday's shit show

Katsuki: Because shit shows are apparently just an everyday thing now

Katsuki: Like a goddamn las vegas attraction

Katsuki: But you know, my actual life

Katsuki: Anyways that's not the point here.

Katsuki: Point is I used to be a real dick to Izuku

Katsuki: Way more than at U.A.

Katsuki: I'm not proud of it, but I can't change it now.

Katsuki: Like he said, it was complicated.

Katsuki: We're working on it, we both have our regrets.

Katsuki: Although I want to be clear, I do not regret the time I burned off like half of his hair

Katsuki: Since that one came up on her list

Katsuki: He deserved that one.

Kaminari: Wait, what could he have possibly done to deserve that?

Midoriya: Oh fuck I forgot about that

Katsuki: Finally got away from Auntie Inko?

Midoriya: Sorta.

Midoriya: I'm very grounded for the next while, but she had to head into the courtroom.

Kaminari: Hang on, no, what did Izuku do

Uraraka: Yeah let's go back to that

Uraraka: There's no way he did something that justified burning off half his hair

Midoriya: No I did

Midoriya: I was 12, everyone makes bad choices when they're 12.

Uraraka: Spill

Midoriya:

Midoriya: In my defense, I was misled by classmates

Midoriya: To believe Kacchan was under the effect of a quirk

Midoriya: Not dissimilar to the curse of sleeping beauty

Midoriya: He'd never fallen asleep at his desk before

Midoriya: At the time, it seemed like a very urgent situation and a rational solution

Uraraka: Oh my god

Uraraka: You didn't

Katsuki: Yeah, he did

Katsuki: I had been up for about 72 hours because of other bullshit

Katsuki: So I fell asleep as soon as lunch rolled around

Katsuki: Woke up to that

Katsuki: And acted accordingly

Uraraka: Alright, I retract my former statement

Uraraka: That was actually a fairly mild reaction given the circumstances

Midoriya: Thankfully he was too tired to use his quirk at full power or chase me for very long.

Kaminari: Wait

Kaminari: Does that mean Izuku was your first kiss???

Midoriya: Unfortunately, yes

Katsuki: Nope.

Midoriya: Wait what

Midoriya: ???

Midoriya: We were 12, who else could you have kissed?

Katsuki: I had a boyfriend for like a week and a half when I was 10

Katsuki: You never met him, he lived in a different area

Katsuki: Kissed him several times before we lost contact

Kaminari: Holy shit

Kaminari: Wait, so the gay thing then?

Katsuki: Yeah, she wasn't lying about me being gay, the sexually devious thing or whatever is bullshit though.

Jirou: I'd ask if you were okay given that was a really shitty way to get outed, but given the new photos that just started popping up of you heading into the courthouse, I'm going to take a stab in the dark and say you're not too broken up about it?

Katsuki: Nope

Katsuki: Saves me the trouble of doing it

Katsuki: Gotta go, looks like we're starting this fucking rodeo

Ashido: Good luck Blasty!

Uraraka: And failing luck, my quirk is really useful for moving bodies

That was the last message he saw before turning his phone off, and it put a smile on his face. Hawks was talking to someone on his communicator, while Eijirou was chattering avidly with Snipe about something. Shouto was staring at his phone, looking a bit lost. After a moment he also turned it off, looking to Katsuki instead.

“What was the curse of sleeping beauty?”

Everyone paused to look at the two of them. Right. This fucker had no childhood.

“Google it later, it’s a fairytale thing.”

He could hear Gang Orca mumble a question under his breath about what possible conversation would spark that question right now, but he ignored it.

“Well with that, it’s time for us to head over!”

Hawks led the way out to the courtroom. Everyone else had already headed in, and the hallway was empty save for Kamui Woods, who was standing guard by the door. He nodded to them as they passed. Eijirou and Shouto pressed themselves a little closer to Katsuki. Hawks was ahead of them, blocking the view while Gang Orca and Snipe were following closely behind.

It was like they thought she would leap at him on sight.

The courtroom was quiet when they entered. He couldn’t see her side of the courtroom over Hawk’s wings, but he could see Tsunagu, who was standing by an empty bench row. All eyes were on him again, but it was fine. Everything was fine.

Katsuki kept his own gaze firmly forward, not focusing on anything in particular as he moved to take his seat. Without a word exchanged, Shouto gave up his position on Katsuki’s right to sit on Eijirou’s other side, while Tsunagu took his place. Izuku moved to sit beside Shouto, and Aiwaza took the seat after him, his eyes darting to check over his students before refocusing on the front of the courtroom.

Once everyone had settled in, the court was called to session. Since Hawks had moved to the

windows, there was nothing blocking Katsuki's view of her anymore. She was looking at him. He could feel it. Her icy glare sent a shiver down his spine.

It wasn't worth looking back. There wasn't anything he wanted to see there.

Everything was fine.

Somehow, he still found himself shifting closer to Tsunagu.

The first half hour of the trial was uneventful. Mostly formalities, opening statements. Their lawyer made the claim that his mother had only ever used reasonable levels of force to control him, that the level of force she had used was being exaggerated, his behavior had justified everything else. It was what they'd expected.

Physical evidence was presented after that. Hospital records, photos of his injuries from right afterwards, a few of his school records. There wasn't much there, most of this would be based on witness testimony.

Naomosa moved to the front of the courtroom as they got ready to call the first witness. His quirk was activated which added weight to the testimonies.

At some point Katsuki had a list with the order everyone was testifying in. What he could remember was that he was going last and Tsunagu was going right before him. Everything else was fuzzy.

Oh, looked like Aizawa was up first.

His testimony consisted mostly of things he'd overheard that had concerned him, behavioral tendencies that he'd made a note of, and going over Katsuki's medical record. As Katsuki's teacher he was able to separate out anything caused by heroics training from anything that couldn't have been caused by training due to either the type of injury or the timing.

Katsuki's mind started drifting elsewhere. While he knew rationally that this was important, he needed to be paying attention, it was hard to convince himself to follow through. It wasn't quite dissociation, at least not from what he'd read, but it was close.

“Mr. Aizawa, did you at any point as Katsuki’s teacher feel that physical force was necessary to correct his behavior?”

Oh. That got him back to the present, his hearing refocusing.

“No. Katsuki occasionally gets carried away in the heat of the moment, but day to day, he’s one of the students I can trust to follow rules and directions. While his general attitude is rough, his moral code is incredibly strong. He listens to criticism well and has made a significant effort to change his behavior when I’ve corrected him in the past.”

“Have you ever felt that his behavior seriously put others at risk? Directly or indirectly?”

“Never. Unlike *some* of my students, Katsuki has never broken the law to engage villains. He has only defended himself in situations where he had no alternative. To my knowledge, he has never injured another student outside of training. While he can be hot-headed during training, when faced with real danger he keeps himself in check without issue. It’s above and beyond what I would expect from any first year heroics student, let alone one with Katsuki’s history.”

Aizawa paused for a second, considering his words. Out of shock, Katsuki glanced towards Naomosa to ensure his quirk was still active. Huh.

“During the USJ attack he saved another student’s life, Izuku Midoriya, after calmly assessing the situation and realizing which villain posed a serious threat. When the training camp was attacked he didn’t engage until given permission. It was thanks to his strategic thinking that Moonfish, an A-ranked villain, was stopped. During the hideout raid, he kept a level head despite having every reason to panic, held his own when he needed to, and escaped as soon as he had the opportunity. Katsuki is one of the few students who can I trust to know his own limitations and deal with danger accordingly.”

He didn’t need to look up to know Tsunagu was smiling at him. Which was good, because Katsuki’s eyes were never going to leave the floor. It was a very interesting floor, and he was going to stare at it until it conceded to his will and swallowed him whole. Any second now.

Damn it.

“Thank you, I have no further questions your honor.”

“Your honor, the defense would like to cross examine the witness.”

“You may.”

“Mr. Aizawa, you claim that you have never needed physical force to correct Bakugou’s behavior, yet at the U.A. Sports Festival, the school decided his behavior warranted using sleeping gas on him and villain level restraints. Can you explain that discrepancy to the court?”

“There’s no discrepancy. The level of force used at the U.A. Sports Festival was entirely unjustified. I was recovering from a severe head injury, so I was asleep or unaware for most of the day. I didn’t have a say in how the situation was dealt with, though I did mishandle the aftermath.”

That head injury had left Aizawa out of it for weeks, even if they’d all pretended not to notice. It was part of the reason Izuku had only been snippy with him.

“Katsuki did follow Shouto Todoroki out of bounds and grab him which was inappropriate, but he didn’t actually attack him. He wasn’t told to put Todoroki down, instead he was immediately gassed, which was an overreaction. There was absolutely no justification for him being restrained in any manner afterwards, let alone with villain level restraints. As stated in the school’s official apology about the matter, Katsuki was not at risk of hurting anyone. He wanted to leave without accepting the award and should’ve been allowed to. Neither time was physical force necessary to correct his behavior. Verbal directions would’ve stopped his pursuit of Todoroki, and there was no reason to correct refusing an award.”

It was strange to hear his teacher say it directly after so long of convincing himself he’d deserved what happened. All-Might himself had thought it was okay so it must’ve been. Katsuki was a bad kid, and that was just what happened to bad kids. Hearing it after all this time left him feeling oddly empty. This struck him as the sort of thing which should trigger an emotional response. A reaction of some kind, good or bad. Maybe he’d run out of emotions for the day. Wouldn’t surprise him.

The defense kept asking questions, but it was the same thing worded differently. After the third time, the judge forced them to move on.

Present Mic went next. More of the same, little things he’d overheard that had worried him. Cementoss was after him. Apparently he kept copies of all of his student’s essays, and upon rereading Katsuki’s had noticed several troubling statements.

All-Might was the last teacher to testify. He expressed regret for his choices at the Sports Festival, mentioned Katsuki's relationship with Izuku, and agreed with Aizawa's assessment of his character. That was all stuff Katsuki had expected, even if hearing it aloud brought back that same empty feeling.

The last few questions from the prosecutors weren't something he'd prepared himself for.

"Finally, you were present for the incident where Katsuki was attacked by the criminal referred to as the Sludge Villain, correct?"

"That is correct, I was able to end the attack and help with some of the aftermath."

"Can you tell the court about what happened after the attack that concerned you?"

"While I was not in charge of assisting Young Katsuki after the attack as I was needed elsewhere, I did review the mission report later in the day. The Sludge Villain was a highly dangerous foe who usually kills his victims after no longer than a minute. Officially Katsuki endured him for six and a half minutes, though I have since been told it was actually closer to ten. Afterwards, he insisted he was fine, and showed no signs of major physical damage. Backdraft contacted his parents to explain the situation, according to the report he was cursed at for several minutes before being told that Katsuki was to be sent home alone. It's highly unusual for parents to refuse an escort for their child after a villain attack, but Katsuki left after overhearing his mother's instructions. At the time, I assumed it was a matter of protecting his pride, though now I'm sure that wasn't the case."

"And to be clear, did Katsuki express that he didn't want an escort?"

"No, he was quite quiet after the attack. While he did leave on his mother's instructions, he didn't attempt to leave the scene prior and didn't protest when he was told he would probably be escorted back by Death Arms and Backdraft. Kamui Woods saw Young Katsuki leave and followed him for two blocks out of concern before the other pros on the scene were able to recall him. He noted in his report that Katsuki seemed very nervous, which was concerning given how calm he'd been during and after the attack."

"Thank you, I have no further questions."

The defense didn't cross examine All-Might, which seemed like an odd choice but Katsuki was

happy to have things move along.

Detective Naomosa himself was next. Really, he was just there to confirm Katsuki had been completely healed prior to being sent home, Tsunagu had reported seeing her hit him and reacted accordingly, and that he formally made the call to push for Katsuki's removal from his home after interviewing Katsuki the next morning.

That was easy enough to sit through. The next one wouldn't be.

Auntie Inko was called up after him. Her eyes were still teary, but she managed a polite smile and there was determination in her posture. Somehow, it was both terrifying and calming. It left Katsuki feeling like a deer caught in the headlights, with a silent panicked acceptance of his fate.

It was Auntie Inko. She wouldn't hurt him, she never would. But she knew so much that could. So much more than he'd let almost anyone else know. The little moments, little things.

Izuku knew Katsuki liked to draw when he was younger, but he hadn't seen one of Katsuki's drawings since Katsuki was seven years old and his mother had burned his sketchbook. He hadn't let anyone see his artwork since. Anyone but Auntie Inko, who he handmade a birthday card for every year. Each had a scene on the inside, a good moment from the past year. Katsuki had never asked her to keep the artwork a secret, but she had anyways because she understood fears he couldn't say aloud.

Potential energy was still energy, even though Katsuki was sure it would never be converted. She would never use those things against him. The potential existed though, and that was terrifying.

Despite all of this, he watched her as they went through the initial formalities. She was soft spoken as ever, but everyone could hear her in the silence of the courtroom. Eventually, the real questions started.

"Now Mrs. Midoriya, can you tell the court when you first met Mitsuki Bakugou?"

"Yes, on my first day of high school. She had skipped a grade, and I had moved to the area recently."

"And you've known her ever since?"

“At least somewhat, yes. I saw her daily during high school. I didn’t spend much time with her until our final year when we got along somewhat. After high school, we spoke every now and then since we lived nearby, but we weren’t close. It wasn’t until we both ended up having kids and my husband left that we reconnected.”

“What was your impression of Mrs. Bakugou during her high school years?”

“For the first three years, she was quite scary for me to be around. While she wasn’t physically violent most of the time, Mitsuki had a way of cutting deep with her words. Anyone was a fair target for her criticism, but she always framed it as if she was trying to help. She’d send girls off in tears about their bodies and act like she had been giving them advice to live healthier. In our fourth year, we were assigned to a project together. After that, I guess she decided I was smart enough to keep around. For the most part, she had cooled off during our last year too; she was so busy working on her modeling career she didn’t have time for much else. I thought she had finally grown up.”

She hadn’t. Katsuki knew that much, and he wasn’t just talking about his own suffering. How many times had he overheard her talking down to someone else at her job? How many times had she seen an old friend at the grocery store and managed to pick up on every flaw they’d developed since she saw them last? It was interesting to know she’d always been that way.

“When you reconnected with her after both of you had children, had she changed at all?”

“Not much. She’d learned to use backhanded compliments instead of pure insults, and she’d learned to play nice with certain people, but really, she was the same as she’d always been. It didn’t help that people liked her so much. Between her modeling career, growing up wealthy, and her natural charisma people would let her get away with anything. I think I fell into that trap too. Mitsuki was always so easy to like, even when I knew she was only using others to get what she wanted.”

“Could you describe how she interacted with Katsuki in front of you?”

“I always remember feeling uncomfortable whenever she was with him. Anything he did, she would find a problem in. She never hit him in front of me, I think she knew I would never have allowed that, but she would spend ages lecturing him. If she was in the room then Katsuki would be on edge and trying to leave. Once she even told him off for breathing too loudly. I never heard her speak kindly of him when he was in the room. She’d tell me about any and all mistakes he’d made recently instead.”

“What did you do when she insulted or lectured him for minor mistakes?”

“I did my best to redirect the conversation. If it was something he’d done, like talking back or making a mistake I’d reassure him that it was fine. Sometimes when I had the courage, I’d tell her she was being too harsh, but she’d laugh me off. Always told me I was too nice to him. For awhile, I tried to remind her of things he’d done well recently, but she would pick any accomplishments of his apart. So instead, I started reminding him of those when she wasn’t there.”

“Did you see anything that concerned you when Katsuki wasn’t around her?”

“In all honesty, I’ve been worried about Katsuki for most of his life. When he was younger, I was worried by how rough he played. How he would lecture Izuku for things that weren’t wrong for a young child to be doing. How he’d show up with bruises and only ever tell me they were from a fight. Most of all though, I was worried by how hard on himself he was. He used to insult himself under his breath when he was younger, though he stopped by the time he was six or so and started going quiet instead. There was also a period when he was five or six, where he got scared of me. It could be anything, breaking a glass by mistake, tripping, putting something down with too much force, and his eyes would go straight to me as if he were waiting for me to hurt him for it. It was around then he started hitting other kids, Izuku included. The thing that struck me most was he would do it in front of me, he never tried to hide it, as if he wasn’t aware that it was wrong.”

“How did you respond when he did something like that?”

“I talked to him. I never raised a hand to him, I never had to. It took awhile at first; he was confused by me more often than not, but he learned. He would apologize too. By the time he was seven or so, he wouldn’t hit when I was around. Though he stopped regularly coming over to our house by the time he was 10, I still saw him every so often. I kept in contact with Mitsuki so I could keep my eye on him.”

“So you found that you were able to change his behavior without any need for violence?”

“Yes, I never even had to raise my voice with him. Katsuki was a good child, he still is. As long as I was patient, he would listen. More often than not I wasn’t changing his behavior, he was correcting himself. All I was doing was telling him how to.”

“During this time, what was your understanding of his relationship to Izuku?”

"I'm not sure it's fair to say I had an understanding of their relationship at the time because I didn't. Nobody did, and in all honesty I'm not sure anyone does now either. At the time, I was almost completely unaware of the bullying that took place during school or when they were off together. I did have some suspicions; Katsuki may not have hit when I was around but he certainly had a harsh tone to his words. Izuku came back with burns or bruises sometimes, though rarely anything serious. But whenever Izuku spoke of Katsuki, he had nothing but nice things to say. When Katsuki did insult him while I was around, he was usually unbothered by it. Izuku wasn't always undeserving of it either. As much as I love my son, he could be a bit much at times, particularly when he was younger. It wasn't until he was 13 that he really started to learn social boundaries. In the end, he was always so excited to see Katsuki or talk about him, so I figured everything must be fine."

"Was there ever a time that Katsuki seriously hurt Izuku outside of the expected combat training injuries? Or times that you were genuinely worried about Katsuki hurting him?"

"There were a few times, but in almost every case it's been both of their faults. The first time was because he was saving Izuku from a drunk driver that almost killed both of them, and obviously it would be ridiculous to be upset with him for that. The second and third time were both accidents. Izuku has always had a very bad habit of not thinking things through before he does them. Katsuki is careful with his explosions, but there's only so much he can do. I don't blame him for either of those times. Beyond that, there were a few other times I worried about, but nothing that made me fear for my son's safety. If anything, I was usually glad to hear Katsuki was with him; he's always kept him safe for me. I only let him go to the I-Expo because I'd heard from Mitsuki that Katsuki was attending it. He'd be grouchy about it, but he always made sure that Izuku was safe."

Alright, that was about all Katsuki could take. His eyes were going back on the floor and they were going to stay there forever. Very suddenly Katsuki wished that he'd gone for a full face mask in his hero costume. Fuck. The heat in his cheeks was not a blush, it was anger and nobody could prove anything because there were no photos allowed.

Somehow, lying to himself wasn't helping against the amused smiles he could feel from Tsunagu and Eijirou on either side of him.

Whatever. Maybe he'd gone out of his way to make sure Izuku was safe a few times. Maybe during the USJ attack he'd gotten a feeling at the back of his neck, that same feeling he got just before Izuku had jumped at the Sludge Villain. That tingle that told him Izuku was pulling some dumb shit and he needed to get there right away. A vague sense of that misty asshole which told him exactly who he needed to hunt down. Somebody had to keep an eye on the nerd, he'd get himself killed otherwise.

After that it was just her going through and adding more information to the medical records, injuries she knew the story behind. Injuries that she didn't. Injuries that weren't there.

He tensed at the end of the prosecutor's questions, ready for the worst.

"The defense has no questions for the witness."

Huh.

Well that was weird, but whatever. Maybe they'd just given up. Katsuki couldn't work up the courage to look over at his parents, but he almost wanted to for a second. What was she planning?

She left the stand after hesitating for a few seconds, looking to the judge to ensure that was it.

Only three witnesses left now. Both his parents had declined to testify themselves. Probably didn't want the prosecutor being able to ask them questions under a truth quirk, that could lead to a lot more trouble.

Izuku took the stand after giving his mother a quick hug. His shoulders were straight and his eyes were determined. When he sat down his eyes were on Katsuki's mother, burning straight into her.

Most of it was things he'd already said but with more details. As luck would have it, Izuku had brought three of his journals from his younger years. Each of them had dates, events, thoughts, feelings, concerns and theories all recorded in his childhood scrawl. Actually it was a bit worrying just how much of Katsuki's life was recorded in those journals. Or well, it would've been if he hadn't suspected that Izuku had his entire life story already written somewhere. At some point he'd resigned himself to it.

Izuku's testimony took the longest of anyone yet, but it was straight forward. It must've been at least a half hour of him recounting events, confirming what was written in his journal and adding in things that hadn't been written down. Finally though, the prosecution had asked their last question.

"Thank you Izuku. No further questions your honor."

Time to move on to-

“Your honor, the defense would like to cross-examine the witness.”

Ah fuck.

“You may proceed.”

Izuku was on guard instantly, his mood shifted from his polite rambling to hostile in a flash. It was the meanest Katsuki had ever seen him look.

“Izuku-”

“Midoriya.”

The defense lawyer stumbled for a beat, but swiftly corrected themselves.

“Mr. Midoriya, you seem to have a very high opinion of Katsuki. Would you say that’s accurate?”

“Kacchan is determined, hard-working, strong, brave, smart, and someone who I aspire to be like as a hero.”

“How would you describe your relationship to Katsuki?”

“He’s my friend.”

“Really? You seem awfully dedicated to him for someone who is just a friend. It doesn’t strike you as odd that someone would tolerate years of bullying, risk their life multiple times, and break laws for a friend?”

“No.”

The look that Izuku was leveling the defense lawyer with was priceless. Katsuki wasn't sure what the hell they were trying to imply, but clearly Izuku wasn't interested in hearing that shit out either. Still the lawyer didn't appear to be backing down. Instead they took the second journal and opened it to a set of pages in the middle.

"Well then, could you please read pages 43 and 44 from your journal for the court? Starting from the second sentence in the third paragraph."

Izuku studied the pages for several moments, brow furrowed and eyes narrowed. Then his face went red. Wait. What the fuck? He was biting his lip too. After a few more long seconds he replied.

"I would actually rather not. I don't think that has anything to with the case."

"To the contrary, I think they give us a clear picture of your view of Katsuki, which I think is key to understanding a potential bias in your testimony. Please read them for the court."

"No thank you."

Okay, yep. His face was very red. What the hell could he have written in there-

Oh he better not have rewritten that shit from the quirk journal.

"Your honor, I would like to insist that Mr. Midoriya read the pages from his journal."

"Denied, you may summarize what's on the pages or read them to the court yourself."

The scowl that got was very satisfying. Still, the defense pressed on.

"Very well. On pages 43 and 44 of Mr. Midoriya's journal from when he was 11 years old, he goes very in depth as to the nature of Katsuki's hair. This is repeated later on in the journal on pages 93 to 95 and two more times in the third submitted journal. Similar poetic waxing about Katsuki's

eyes, quirk, and combat skill can be found throughout all three journals, often spanning multiple pages.”

Well. Alright, so on the one hand, it wasn’t what Katsuki had been worried about. On the other hand, he wasn’t sure if this was worse. At least he understood what Izuku was blushing about now.

“Tell me Mr. Midoriya, have you written about any of your other friends in such a detailed and extensive manner?”

“Well, I mean, no, but that’s because I’m not 11 anymore. I didn’t have much of a filter when I was a kid, and that ended up in my writing a lot. I didn’t have many other friends at the time, and Kacchan was the one I’ve known the longest. It’s a growing older thing.”

“Ah, so currently you would say you focus on Katsuki about as much as you do any of your other friends? Not counting the latest incident of course.”

“I mean, yeah. Close to the same.”

“So let’s say Katsuki’s schedule. On any given day, would you say you know where Katsuki would be normally. Even outside of school hours?”

“...Yes.”

“How many of your other friends do you feel you could confidently give the schedule of outside of school hours?”

“...None of them. But that’s because Kacchan keeps a very consistent schedule and we live near each other! So I see where he’s going a lot. It’s the same places and the same times for the most part, so it’s easy to know his schedule.”

On a very strange level it was actually almost comforting to have Izuku being forced to talk about his more stalker tendencies. He would still prefer to not have to hear about this shit, even if he was already aware of it on some level. Fucker had taken samples of his sweat without asking his permission before, Katsuki knew there was probably some other weird shit going on. Whatever, he’d given up caring ages ago, and Izuku did figure out social boundaries *eventually*.

Still, misery loves company. If Katsuki was going to have to have his childhood mistakes put on display, a selfish part of him was glad he wasn't alone.

The defense lawyer was still quizzing Izuku on his knowledge of Katsuki's life. Around him the mood was split evenly between confusion, pity and amusement. Glancing to his right, Eijirou had a crinkle in his forehead, mouth slightly open. He must've felt Katsuki's gaze because he made eye contact after a few seconds. They weren't allowed to talk during the trial, but thankfully Katsuki could read lips.

'Has he always been... ?'

Yes. Yes he had. Katsuki rolled his eyes and nodded. After a second or two he followed that up with a shrug. Eijirou couldn't read lips but he was good with body language. It appeared that Tsunagu caught the conversation as well because he huffed a silent laugh.

"-Can you then say with absolute certainty you have never harbored any romantic feelings or intentions towards Katsuki Bakugou?"

Wait, what the fuck. Where had the questioning gone when he wasn't paying attention? Suddenly his attention was back at the front of the courtroom, where Izuku was beet red down to his neck.

"I'm not answering that."

"Mr. Mid-"

"Counselor, that's enough. This line of questioning is inappropriate. Unless you can provide significant evidence that Mr. Midoriya's testimony was unfactual, then you must move on or end your questioning."

Oh thank fuck.

"...Sorry your honor. No further questions."

So, good news. That shit show was over with now. Down to two people left.

Bad news, Tsunagu was up next which meant he was going up to the stand. Which wasn't inherently bad, but Tsunagu was a singular person only capable of existing in one location at a time. As such, him going up to the stand meant he would not be sitting next to Katsuki anymore.

It was so dumb. He was in a room full to the brim with pro-heroes. There was no way in hell she'd try anything. Eijirou was right here, his teachers were here, fucking Izuku was here. Tsunagu wasn't even going that far, it was 20 feet at most.

He was fine. Nothing was going to happen. This was too stupid to worry about.

Rationally he was aware he was safe, instinct was a bitch though. Katsuki could usually reign in his ingrained reactions, but that took effort and he was already so tired. It'd been easy when Tsunagu was sitting next to him, because Tsunagu had stopped her before. He hadn't let her hit him. He could stop her again. Sure, almost anyone else in the room would probably also do that, but 'would' wasn't 'had'. 'Would' could be debated, chased in circles, lead down rabbit holes and twisted by his mind. 'Had' couldn't.

Luckily, sort of, Katsuki had never been the sort to panic loudly. When the anxiety throbbed through his skull, he went quiet. It made it easier. Made people think he was calm. As long as he kept his breathing even, nobody would notice.

Alright, Izuku who had moved back to his seat, definitely noticed. He always did, but he didn't count. Tsunagu wrapped a careful arm around Katsuki's shoulders, ever so careful not to shift the scarf as he did so. That helped. He leaned into the side hug that lasted only a moment or two before Tsunagu had to slide out from the bench.

Eijirou's arm was on him after that. Normally that would make him feel safe, or at least safer. Were it anyone but her, it would've. Against her though, all he wanted was for Eijirou to be as far from her as possible. She had stolen so many friendships from him already.

Her eyes were on him. He could feel them. They broke through his defenses, the walls he built up ever so carefully shattered, his skin felt frozen solid. Trapping him inside his own flesh.

Someone was moving. Eijirou's arm was sliding off his shoulder, and another was wrapping

around him. He could feel a scarf against the side of his face again, though this one was bigger, a rougher texture, meant for battle instead of fashion.

“You’re alright kid.”

It was quiet but firm. Slowly Katsuki managed to regain control of himself. Fuck. He hadn’t meant to panic that badly. It was so fucking dumb; she couldn’t do shit and he knew it and Tsunagu was still less than twenty feet away and he shouldn’t be this fucking weak-

“Breathe.”

Yeah. Alright. That was a good idea. Panicking about panicking was not going to solve anything. Katsuki forced his breathing to slow down again, shifting his weight to lean against his teacher ever so slightly.

Aizawa was the first teacher Katsuki ever liked. He’d always listened to his other teachers, he couldn’t risk his spotless record after all. But he’d never particularly liked any of his teachers prior to UA. Either they hated his guts or they went out of their way to praise him. It was pathetic. Aizawa hadn’t fallen into either category. He didn’t put up with anyone’s shit, least of all Katsuki’s, but he cared about them.

Hell, the USJ attack alone was proof of that. His teacher had fought until he couldn’t anymore to keep them safe. He’d done everything he could at the training camp too.

It wasn’t quite the same as Tsunagu by his side, but Aizawa’s tired presence was comforting in its own way. Some part of his mind tried to whisper that he must’ve known, he wouldn’t have stopped her. It was easier to ignore now. Aizawa wouldn’t have almost died for them if he didn’t care about his students. He wouldn’t be here now if he didn’t care about Katsuki.

That much he knew for sure.

After a few seconds he was finally grounded enough to refocus on what was happening in the room. From the sound of things, the case had started up again. A few pairs of eyes were watching him closely, his classmates for sure, probably anyone sitting nearby, but the spotlight wasn’t on him.

He leaned into his teacher's side the slightest bit. Aizawa didn't move away, even after Katsuki had calmed down and he was grateful for that.

"Now Mr. Hakamata, you were Katsuki Bakugou's mentor for a week long period, correct?"

"Yes, I sent him the nomination after the UA Sports Festival."

"What did you see during that internship that concerned you?"

"I've had many interns through my doors. I've found talented young heroes can lose their way because they lacked the right guidance. So I make it a point to offer some of my internships to teenagers who have potential but could easily be lead down the wrong path. I was initially drawn to Katsuki by a number of factors, but part of it was that I knew him largely from the media narrative crafted around him. I was caught up in an idea of him that had been painted for me, of him being rash, angry and uncontrollable. That wasn't what I found."

There was a reflective look in Tsunagu's eyes. Regret maybe. He pushed past it.

"Katsuki was a well-behaved intern in his own way. He followed directions. Even when he didn't like them, he listened. It struck me as very odd, how he was out spoken, loud, aggressive in many ways, yet in just as many ways he was controlled and careful. I didn't understand him. At the time I considered myself to have failed and tried to move on, but the week stuck with me. I checked in on his progress a few times out of curiosity. I felt I had missed something important. That I had made a mistake somewhere, but I couldn't pinpoint what was wrong."

"Can you describe what happened on the evening after Katsuki was recovered?"

"I woke up in a hospital after being healed. Katsuki had been brought to the same hospital by his friends after they rescued him. He was asleep in the bed next to mine. I was cleared to leave but waited as I wanted to speak to him before we parted ways. I overheard that his parents were unwilling to come retrieve him so he was going to have to stay in the hospital overnight. Obviously I couldn't leave him there after he had just survived such a traumatic experience so I offered to escort him home."

"Did Katsuki protest the escort at all or seem upset that his parents weren't coming to get him?"

"He didn't protest the escort, but he seemed unsurprised his parents weren't coming. When we were in the car, he commented that I hadn't needed to do that, but he was too tired to argue the point after I pointed out it was my job to help him."

"When you arrive at the Bakugou household, what was your first impression?"

"I was immediately struck by the feeling that something was wrong. Katsuki was... quiet. It's hard to describe, but it was a very troubling sight. Upon reflection, I believe he was scared of seeing her, but I'd never seen him afraid before so I didn't understand it. Even during the kidnapping he was calm in the face of impossible odds."

For a long time, Katsuki hadn't understood that fighting was supposed to scare people. He had adored any kind of combat ever since he was a kid, whether it was training, taking on kids twice his size, or one of the rare times he could pull someone into sparring with him. Now he was pretty sure it was because he was already getting smacked around more often than not. Being able to fight back felt so much better.

"Can you tell the court what happened next?"

"Yes, he went to open the door and the next thing I knew he'd been dragged into the house. His mother had grabbed him and hit him twice before I could react. When she went to hit him for a third time I interfered by grabbing her hand."

"So after he had been attacked, kidnapped, held as a prisoner, fought off multiple villains, and only barely escaped, the first thing she did was hit him?"

"More than that, she was yelling at him, insulting him and blaming him for being kidnapped. What worried me most though was his reaction. Katsuki was shaking badly, clearly scared of her and upset about what was happening, but he never attempted to fight back. At best he tried to get out a few words in his defense, but he never struck back or yelled over her. He seemed resigned to what she was doing, like it was normal. Moreover, he seemed genuinely confused when I stopped her from hitting him. Like it was unthinkable that I would try to protect him."

At the time it had been. In all honesty Katsuki had been more upset that she would hit him while his former mentor was there than the fact she was hitting him. He had been expecting to get knocked around, and for her to blame him. Beating it into him that everything was his fault was par for the course by now. But usually she wasn't bad when someone else was around. It gave him some dignity in his punishment if nothing else. Let him keep up the image that he was untamable. Unbreakable. Unphased by anything. Katsuki Bakugou had to be fearless, because if he was

anything less he might shatter.

Though, he wasn't exactly going to be Katsuki Bakugou anymore, was he? So maybe being fearless wasn't so important either. Maybe it was for the best that he had shattered.

"What happened next?"

"I spoke up in Katsuki's defense, telling her it was inappropriate to hit him. I was still unsure of how bad the situation was, and she did appear distraught so I tried for a peaceful approach. She grew angry with me, asking me who I was to correct her. I introduced myself and explained why I was there. Her reaction told me two things. First and foremost, it was not unusual for her to hit Katsuki; she saw it as an acceptable normal action. Second, from how Katsuki reacted when she said that, he also believed it to be acceptable."

"So, given that Katsuki had just been through a highly traumatic experience and you had reasonable evidence that he was in danger if left at his home, what did you do next?"

"My job is to protect people, so I did just that. There was no way I could leave Katsuki there, so I made up a story about a secondary villain risk. Usually I don't believe in lying, but it was the only way for me to safely remove him from the situation. She was upset, but there wasn't much she could do. Katsuki went to go get a few of his things. He was confused but followed directions anyways."

It had thrown him for a loop that was for sure. But it had been more about the idea that someone would stop her than anything else. Everything up until Tsunagu caught her hand had made sense to him. After that... it was like someone changed the rules of the very universe he lived in. That wasn't how it was meant to work, and he hadn't known what to do about that shit beyond what he was told.

"What happened after Katsuki retrieved his things?"

"I don't know what occurred upstairs but his father was following him when he came back. Katsuki appeared to be trying to ignore him. I wasn't sure why until I realized that he was blaming Katsuki for what his mother had just done. I didn't want to say anything, lest I risk starting a fight, but it was a near thing for my self-control. We went back to the car which had been instructed to head to my apartment next. All things considered, I decided that was the safest place to take him."

The arm around him had tightened at some point. Katsuki didn't mind. Carefully he glanced up towards his teacher, trying to subtle but needing to know what was going through Aizawa's mind.

It wasn't like he'd never seen Aizawa angry before. With the bullshit their class got up to, he saw it at least once a day. He'd seen him pissed, defensive, disappointed, the whole range of emotions that came out when one of them was in danger. This was different.

Aizawa's gaze was fixed across the room. Where *they* were sitting. His eyes weren't red but there was a tint of crimson to them. They were narrowed to near points, intently focused and downright murderous. His expression was almost calm. Almost. There was enough of a twist to his mouth, and the flared nostrils betrayed his rage. There was also an odd touch of guilt to the tenseness of his shoulders. Katsuki looked back down to the floor.

Emotions were hard for Katsuki to understand. Anger was one of the ones he thought he had down. Apparently not though, because he wasn't able to comprehend the level of anger his teacher was radiating out. Or, well, he couldn't understand that level of anger being in his defense instead of directed at him. For the time being, he put the anger to the side. Focusing on what you could change instead of what you couldn't.

A second of thought ticked by before Katsuki pushed himself closer to Aizawa. Pressing the side of his face into his teacher's side and shifting his shoulders to fit a bit more comfortably. Her eyes were on him now. They had only left for a brief period, probably to glare at Tsunagu. Now though they were back, even as Tsunagu had moved onto describing their encounter in the car.

Cold ice burned into his skin where he could feel her gaze, but he spitefully pretended he couldn't feel it. Fuck her. Fuck her for the guilt, fear, and weakness boiling in his gut over a goddamn hug. Fuck her for the voice in his head that even now was telling him to pull away, to start yelling, to be upset about the physical contact he despreately needed right now.

What mattered to him was his teacher had relaxed. Not much, but it was better than nothing. Katsuki could feel his teacher's gaze shift to him. Surprise, maybe? Unimportant. A second or two ticked by before Aizawa resettled fully, looking back up. Whether the guilt was gone or not, Katsuki wasn't sure. He couldn't feel that tension anymore though. That was worth the pain of her gaze.

Speaking of guilt, Katsuki moved one hand blindly to his other side. It only took a second for Eiji to take it. The tension in his calloused palm was clear. Katsuki didn't even have to look at him to know he was trying to blame himself for this. The absolute idiot.

Right now he wasn't able to tell him off so he just gave that hand a squeeze and hope his message translated. After a second, the hand squeezed back. Close enough.

He should probably refocus now and figure out where they were in the trial.

Hm.

A few more seconds ticked by before Katsuki finally summoned the willpower to process the words from the front of the courtroom.

"-Thank you Mr. Hakamata. No further questions."

Oh. It hit Katsuki that he might be losing time. Not much, but it hadn't felt like long enough for them to have finished everything Tsunagu was supposed to go over.

"The defense would like to cross-examine the witness your honor."

Those were quickly becoming Katsuki's least favorite words. Really, there wasn't much that they should be able to do questioning Tsunagu, but Katsuki still didn't like it. Now he was laser-focused on the conversation.

"Mr. Hakamata, you said at the start of your testimony that you originally took on Katsuki as an intern because you were worried about the path he might go down, correct?"

"Yes. I could repeat my statement if you had trouble hearing it, or the part right after where I said my original assumptions were incorrect."

Katsuki picked up on a light snort from the side of the room, faint but there. Probably Gang Orca? He had been stationed over there last Katsuki had seen.

"No, that's quite alright. Would you say that you were concerned about the possibility Katsuki could become a villain during the time he was interning with you?"

The arm around him tightened as Katsuki's heart almost stopped. He didn't want to hear the answer. Tsunagu was under a truth quirk, and while he was certain Tsunagu didn't think Katsuki would become a villain now, there was no way he hadn't thought it at the time. Fuck. It was cowardly, but he didn't want to have his fear cemented like this. Not while she was here. Things were different now, he'd told the villains no, but it hurt to thin-

"No, not in the least."

Oh.

"From the moment he walked through my door, I was well aware Katsuki wouldn't become a villain. For all his flaws, he had the heart of a hero. It was part of why he confused me and part of why I wasn't able to help. He was blindingly determined to become a hero. Despite everything, he had the right goal in mind. I never doubted that he would get there eventually. I was concerned about the effect the process of getting there might have on him. There are many paths to becoming a hero, and I feared he would end up on one filled with unneeded pain."

Huh. From the stunned silence, guess the defense lawyer wasn't expecting that one either.

"Ah. Uh- But you would say you took him on with the intention of reforming him, correct?"

"I offered Katsuki an internship with the intention of reforming some of his behaviors, yes."

"You don't find it odd at all to be petitioning for custody of a teenager you only spent a week with? Who you had originally only been interested in reforming? When you've never had custody of a child before?"

"Not in the slightest. I've wanted a child of my own for quite awhile. In the past, I've seriously considered adoption, but the circumstances were never right. So I knew what I was committing to. I took Katsuki as an intern because I wanted to help him. I felt I failed to do that during his internship. Afterwards, I kept my eye on him, hopeful I might have a second chance when he began his heroics work-study. I was given a second chance sooner than I thought."

Tsunagu had told him most of this already, but there was something about hearing it said and knowing it couldn't be a lie. Even odder was this being said in front of so many other people. In front of *her*.

“After looking over the possibilities and accounting for Katsuki’s unique situation, we determined me taking custody would be a viable option. I was already fond of Katsuki, I wanted to help him regardless of what role I took in his life, and I felt I could be a good guardian for him. He agreed to it after we discussed his options together. While I do consider myself lucky to have been given the opportunity, the choice itself is not odd given the circumstances.”

Whatever the defense lawyer had been hoping to get out of him, they clearly hadn’t gotten it. Seconds ticked by until the lawyer finally responded.

“Thank you, no further questions. Your Honor, my client and I would like to call for a short recess before the final witness.”

For fuck’s sake. Of course the judge granted it, it’d been long enough to justify a short break. People started standing up around him. Tsunagu was probably on his way back over. Someone was shifting him lightly, and he moved without protest. They didn’t want to stay here where she could approach him.

Katsuki wasn’t sure what her plan was; for all he knew, she didn’t actually have one. But he had a bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. As he stepped out of the courtroom he could still feel her heavy glare on him, pulling his limbs down as if they were waterlogged. She was going to talk to him, he just knew it. Or worse, his father might instead. His father was more subdued around others, more kind, but maybe he’d given up too. Even though he knew they couldn’t hurt him, not here, not with everyone around, he still felt his throat closing up. It had been easier in the courtroom, where he’d known they couldn’t say anything. Anxiety flooded his veins, freezing his blood. He felt small. Helpless. Unable to fight back against them, just like he always was. Weak. Pathetic. A fake. Never good enough.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

He tried to force himself to keep breathing, but it wasn’t enough this time, not in the face of her. Of him. Of them. Mechanically his body moved on autopilot out of the courtroom, not registering the people around him. He was too focused on his inevitable fate. In some distant world he felt his foot catch and he stumbled. Stupid. Weak. Couldn’t even walk right. Katsuki expected to fall, not having the presence of mind to catch himself.

Only, there were hands on him.

Stopping him from falling. Holding him up. Somewhere in that distant world he heard voices. It hit him then; he couldn’t feel her eyes anymore. The biting cold of her glare was gone.

Air rushed back into his lungs. Time ticked by him as he slowly made his way back, but when he did those hands were still on him. Steady. Steady, the hands said. He could feel them, but he couldn't see them. Why couldn't he see them? Oh, his eyes must be closed. Katsuki's body still felt detached from him, but his control was returning.

After several seconds of effort, his eyes blinked open and he saw everything.

Shouto was in front of him, having taken Katsuki's hands in what had become a strangely familiar gesture. Eijiro was behind him, hands gently placed on his back, guiding him forward. A scarred hand was clutching his left shoulder, and a larger, gentler, comforting hand was holding his right. He could feel denim against that shoulder, Tsunagu having curled over him, talking quietly. Outside of those touching him, it seemed his teachers had formed a ring of sorts. Aizawa and All-Might standing within arms-length in front of him, Mic and Gang Orca on either side. Peering behind his shoulder where he knew she must be, all he could see over the crowd was a pair of red wings and a tell-tale cowboy hat. He couldn't tell much about Snipe's mood from here, but those wings were vibrating. Tension or excitement, Katsuki couldn't tell, maybe it was both.

His hearing still hadn't turned back in, but... that was okay. Katsuki didn't need to hear what was being said. Not yet anyways. He was... safe.

The realization washing over him was like stepping into a warm bath in the dead of winter. Even with her in the same room, wanting to hurt him, he was safe. Because there were people on his side. They were here, they were protecting him, and they weren't going anywhere. It was what he'd been telling himself the whole day, but for the very first time he could feel himself believe it.

Katsuki let his eyes fall shut again, purposefully this time. The recess would be over soon and he'd be on that stand. Baring his soul, his past, his weakness for so many people to see. It was going to be her last chance to hurt him but-.

No.

She'd already lost that. No matter what she tried, she couldn't reach him. Not with her blows, not with her gaze, and not with her words. His father couldn't either. Those poisonously soft words meant nothing. He didn't have to listen to those false promises, didn't have to let those words fester in his soul, didn't have to blame himself for what she did yet again. There were people here now who made promises they meant. People who didn't beat him down about everything. People who cared about him.

Whatever they said, whatever questions he was asked, none of it mattered. Their words weren't the only ones in his life anymore, he had better people to listen to now.

Katsuki reopened his eyes, feeling himself flood back into his body. A dam had broken somewhere, setting free rivers of fire to burn away the last of her ice. He gave Shouto's hands a soft squeeze. Turning slightly he made eye contact with Izuku, green meeting crimson, an unspoken conversation passing between them. The hands on his own and on his left shoulder fell away. Behind him, it only took a slight nudge for Kirishima to understand too, letting those guiding hands drop, though he didn't move from his self-assigned place as Katsuki's guard.

Only one hand left, Katsuki looked to his right. This hand was a bit different. He leaned into it, letting Tsunagu wrap him up in a careful hug. Everything was fine. He wasn't in danger here. He was *safe*.

"Are you back with us?"

The question was soft, for his ears alone. Katsuki nodded.

"Yeah. Just needed a second."

His reply was soft too, but he knew it was heard. Tsunagu tightened his arms around him.

"Will you be okay to take the stand? It's okay if you need more time."

Katsuki let himself grin, just a little. He couldn't remember the last time he'd smiled in the same room as her. Maybe he never had, wouldn't surprise him. But she didn't matter now, she couldn't steal his smilies anymore.

"Nah, I'm fine."

For once, he meant it.

Today had already been an incredibly long day, despite the fact it was only 11 AM. While Katsuki was doing an astounding job holding up against an emotionally trying experience, he had been through hell this week. At several points Tsunagu had almost requested a recess, only to force himself not to. Any spare time just gave Katsuki more time to worry. More time spent near her and more time for something to go wrong. Every second in the trial room already felt like an eternity.

The moment they'd called a recess he'd been worried. Katsuki had already seemed on edge, and panic had overtaken him quickly. It had taken longer than it should've to get through the crowd to him, and once he was there, he wasn't sure how to help. They had to move out of the courtroom and while Katsuki was following, he didn't seem aware of anything.

Of course she was trying to talk to him. Thankfully, she hadn't been able to get close despite her best efforts. Everyone at the courtroom was well aware of her planned attempt. Katsuki wasn't aware enough to move further than the hallway, but there was enough space for those present to completely block her out. Hawks and Snipe had taken up guard positions nearest to where she and her husband were waiting.

Vaguely, Tsunagu was pretty sure he heard Hawks mutter something about giving him a reason, and the slight vibrations to his wings suggested he was only barely holding himself back from pouncing, but he was out of fucks to give. His focus was on the spaced out teenager in his arms. It was terrifying, it was as if Katsuki was out of his reach even though he was right in front of him. Lost somewhere he couldn't follow no matter how badly he wanted to.

Katsuki found his own way back before he could make the call to extend the break. Whatever journey he undertook, he'd come out from it calmer than before, and while Tsunagu was hesitant, that fire had returned to his eyes at long last.

So they went back into the courtroom. There was a nervous energy in the air. Aizawa looked like he wanted to pull Katsuki out of the room, willing or not, and Tsunagu couldn't blame him. For his part, Katsuki was calm. Not the quiet from before, this was different. He was calm, but his footsteps were firm instead of silent. Each step soft but ringing clear in the silence of the room.

Only seconds left, Tsunagu barely remembered in time that Katsuki needed to remove his mask first. He reached up carefully to undo the ties. Katsuki let him, tucking the fabric in his pocket afterwards.

There was so much that he wanted to say but he didn't have time to say any of it. Looking into

those fiercely burning crimson eyes as he pulled Katsuki into a quick hug, he knew his message got across anyways.

Then he was gone. Tsunagu was gently nudged into sitting by Kugo. He was fairly sure there were people on either side of him now, but his eyes were fixed on the front of the courtroom.

"Thank you for being here Katsuki, I understand this has been a hard experience for you."

If that wasn't the understatement of the fucking century right there.

"Well I figured I'd get all my emotionally traumatizing experiences for the year out of the way at once. Makes it easier if I get them all off my plate during summer."

Katsuki's delivery was deadpan, and Tsunagu had to fight back a laugh. It seemed in finding his calm Katsuki had found a sense of humor in the disasters unfolding around him. There was a small kindness in that if nothing else.

"Yes, you've really had quite the week. To start us off, I have this list here which details various methods of punishment your parents have used on you over the years. Can you confirm you wrote this?"

"I did. Everything on the list was a real event or series of events that occurred, and to the best of my knowledge, nothing was exaggerated."

There was a long stretch after that where the prosecutor went through each bullet point on the list. Katsuki was almost relaxed as he confirmed each point, adding details to some, making slight corrections to others. Everyone else only got more tense as the list went on.

The quirk restraints were about halfway down on the list. When the prosecutor paused to grab a bag, Tsunagu knew what was coming next. Sure enough sickening black objects were revealed a second later.

"To address the next item, can you tell the court what these are?"

Katsuki nodded and held out his hand to take the restraints, turning them over in his grasp thoughtfully.

"Quirk restraints. Sorta. Honestly, they're more like quirk absorbers for me, but they're called restraints officially so whatever."

"You're very familiar with this particular pair, right? Despite the fact that these are illegal for use on children or any unwilling parties?"

"Yep. My mother would force me into these about once a week, used to be a lot more often. It was standard for any time I used my quirk in the house. These days it was mostly when I got a nightmare and sparked off in my sleep, but sometimes it'd be because I needed to burn off the nitroglycerin in the house or lost my temper and sparked a bit."

"Have you ever ignited an object you didn't meant to ignite while sleeping? Or when you've lost your temper? Anything that would put you at risk of harming yourself or others?"

"Not since I was five or six, and even then it only happened twice that I can recall. My quirk is a lot weaker when I'm sleeping, the nitroglycerin concentration goes way down so at most it's light sparks going off. I've been told they're noisy, but they don't catch stuff on fire. Same for sparking off in general, it can be a bit surprising, but it's not dangerous unless I'm in a room of C4 or something."

"So you never felt that you were at risk of harming yourself or someone else without these, but they have still been forced onto you weekly since you got your quirk?"

"Yeah. There was a smaller version of them that was used when I was younger but they only lasted so long."

"And have you ever been harmed or put at risk because of these restraints?"

"A few times, yep. Like I said, they really just absorb shit. If they're on for longer than twelve hours then there's almost always too much build up. The couple of times that's happened it's ignited and given me second degree burns up to my shoulders."

"To clarify for the court, you cannot put these restraints on yourself and once locked into place,

you cannot remove them, correct?"

Katsuki's response to that was flipping the restraints around and sliding his arms into them. Everyone in the room tensed up, and for a heartbeat all Tsunagu could see was that podium. That chair. Chains around his waist and a muzzle in his mouth. Meanwhile Katsuki just kept talking.

"I can slide 'em on like this but that's about it. The straps on the sides have to be tightened by someone else, which is the actual restraint part. Otherwise they just slide back off. Obviously once they're on I can't get to the straps myself, even with my teeth. Tried that once when I could tell they were gonna to ignite soon and ended up making this scratch but couldn't get 'em off."

Gloved fingers trailed over a deep gouge on the side thoughtfully before passing the restraints back to the prosecutor.

"Oh, uh, thank you for demonstrating. You also mentioned during your interview with Detective Naomasa that you were kicked out of the house with these on at one point?"

That story in particular had dug deep at Tsunagu's heart. Katsuki just nodded.

"Oh yeah, that was when I was, uh, 10? Yeah, I woulda been 10. I woke up sparking off again for the second time in a row, but when she put those on me I bitched at her about it. We got into a fight, she told me to get out, so I did. Ended up scaring a few people I'm pretty sure. Honestly I probably looked like something out of a horror movie since I was wearing all black. Stayed out of the house for about 36 hours that time."

"What did you do about the restraints given that they were dangerous for periods longer than 12 hours?"

"I got lucky, a weird teenager helped me out of 'em at about 3 am. Don't know what his deal was, but he was pretty nice. Had to stop him from burning them after he took 'em off me. He offered to let me run with him if I wanted, but I told him I was going to become a hero and he got the hint. We went our separate ways afterwards, and I kept 'em in my go-bag for the rest of the time."

"You had a go-bag for getting kicked out of your house?"

"Well yeah, that or just in case I ever decided to go through with running away. Or I guess if

something else bad happened that required me to leave the house for an extended period."

"How often were you kicked out of the house?"

"Not too often, maybe two dozen times over the years? It wasn't particularly effective since I spent most of my time out in the woods anyways. There were shrines and stuff for me to chill at, so she didn't bother with it after I was 12 or so. Hell, sometimes I'd spend the night out there to get away from the house for a bit."

"You regularly spent the night out in the woods? At what age did you start doing that?"

"Ah. Hm, okay, I don't think I did it before I got my quirk, but I spent at least one night out there before she got the quirk restraints, so I'd say about 5 years old."

There was a stunned silence in the courtroom for several heartbeats. This hadn't come up in the interviews at all, although it shouldn't have been too shocking either.

"What did your parents do when you would spend the night out in the woods alone? Particularly when you were younger? Did you have their permission?"

"Nah, for the most part they didn't give a fuck as long as I got myself to school on time, showed up for whatever they wanted to drag me to, and wasn't gone for more than a few days at a time. If I wanted to go fuck off to the woods for a day or two, well it meant less fighting in the house. Most of the time they wouldn't even notice if they weren't looking for me for something. By the time I was 10 I could get away with a whole week without heading home as long as they were busy with something at work."

Alright. Well. That would further explain some of the fierce independence.

"Your parents wouldn't notice if you were gone for a week if you were 10? Didn't they worry about what you were eating?"

"Nah. I was doing most of my own cooking by the time I was 8. Before that I just packed easy shit like sandwiches. Besides, I'd often be gone for most of the afternoon anyways regardless of where I was, either training or dicking around with some of the kids in our neighborhood. Neither of them got usually home before 8 pm, which is an hour before I'd be in bed, so it was a pretty limited time

for them to miss me. Mostly depended on the time of year, and whether or not my mom was actively pissed with me about something."

Katsuki described a horrific tale of neglect as if it were the most casual thing in the world. If anything, he almost seemed... proud? Fond of the memories? Unlike his purposeful calm before, this was different. He seemed to be legitimately unaware of how unusual it was for a young child to go off on their own like that.

"What happened if you got hurt though? Did they have ways to check in with you?"

Now the prosecutor had switched from the planned questions to trying to get to the bottom of this new aspect of his childhood. This had never come up during the planning stages of the trial. The shift threw Katsuki off, but he didn't seem upset. Raising one eyebrow, he gave a shrug as he replied.

"If I got hurt, I sorted that out myself. I got a cell phone when I was 12, but I was usually out of cell range. If I didn't show up to school Izuku woulda noticed and told 'em so I wasn't usually in that much danger. There were a few risky Friday nights when I was younger, but one of 'em lead to me learning out how to fly with my quirk. Wanting to survive is a great motivator to figure shit out."

"I-. I'm sorry, could you tell us more about that event? What happened?"

Wait. If Tsunagu was remembering correctly, Katsuki said he had learned how to fly when he was-

"I was seven and I made a dumb mistake. There was a cave I'd found and I thought it'd be great to go explore it. At the start was a sharp drop that I climbed down to reach the rest of the cave. Of course it wasn't very stable, and when I tried to use an explosion to move a boulder I caused a cave in. Luckily the entrance wasn't blocked but one of my arms got pinned by falling rocks. The damage wasn't too bad, I could still feel it and everything, but I couldn't risk knocking it off of me. If I did then I could cause another cave-in and I knew it would take me at least 20 minutes to climb back to the entrance. Just my luck too because that was when it started raining."

Katsuki told the story fondly, as if recounting his first day at school and not a near death experience.

"It was Friday night, so I knew that nobody would be looking for me until Monday morning. My parents were on a work trip, so it could be even longer since Izuku might think I'd gone with them.

Water had already started to collect in the cave, it was more of a hole than a cave by that point. Obviously I'd drown by the time anyone knew I was gone so I was on my own. When it got up to my knees I realized I need to think of something or I was going to drown. Before that I'd used my explosions for a boost while hopping, but I hadn't tried to use them as the main force. I estimated how much force I needed to use, blasted myself free and then rocketed myself up the rock face. Got out in the nick of time. My arm was a bit mangled, but I fixed it up as soon as I got back. When it healed up I tried the same move again at my training field and it worked great. Took a couple of nasty falls and setting up a lot of traps to really get it down, but that was the first time I tried it."

He'd said it before, but Tsunagu was hit by the very strong urge to question how Katsuki was still alive, let alone in possession of all of his limbs.

"Traps?"

"Yeah, you know, like spring loaded knives, nets, tripwires and stuff. I'd set them up in an old house to practice dodging and speed up my reflexes. How else was I going to learn that shit?"

"Did you never attended formal quirk training? Or combat classes?"

Katsuki snorted.

"God no, even if I'd managed to get my parents to agree to it, they'd use it to threaten me. I taught myself everything up until U.A.. Used a lot of books and the internet to figure out fighting basics, there was a quarry that I practiced blasting things in, an abandoned house for fighting in enclosed spaces, and eventually I managed to build some scrap metal bots to practice on. Didn't do much but skitter around but they worked well for improving my aim."

To his left there was a quiet '*what the fuck*' from Aizawa. Apparently Katsuki's teacher had been unaware he was self-taught. Glancing around, only Izuku seemed unsurprised by all of this. It made Tsunagu wonder what else they didn't know about Katsuki because he hadn't thought to mention it. Conversations for another time, but that they need to have soon. For now though he refocused on the prosecutor as they started questioning him further on childhood dangers.

All in all, the questioning lasted for 45 minutes before the prosecution finally finished. The room had collectively entered a state of stunned disbelief by the end, but tension resurged as the defense lawyer stood to cross-examine. A few of the more emotional people in the room were radiating down right hostility, and the nerves were clear. Today had obviously not gone how the defense lawyer had wanted it to go, but they were still trying to press on.

"Mr. Bakugou"

"Sorry, I think you've got the wrong person. Mr. Bakugou's behind you. Easy mistake to make, happens all the time I'm sure."

Unlike everyone else in the room, Katsuki was downright enjoying this. His tone was conversational, his posture polite, but his eyes were sparkling with mischief. The defense lawyer fixed him with a long look before wisely deciding to pick their battles.

"Katsuki. We've heard quite a bit from Mr. Midoriya earlier about your history together. How would you describe your interactions with him?"

"Well you'll need to be a lot more specific than that. I've known Izuku since we were kids, we've interacted tons of times, I can't summarize all of that at once."

Smart move, refusing to name specifics meant that the defense lawyer could only work with what they already knew.

"Can you recall any times that you've acted hostility towards him?"

That got an actual laugh out of Katsuki, it took him a moment to regain himself. Shaking himself slightly and raising an incredulously eyebrow he finally replied, ignoring the agitated look on the defense lawyer's face.

"Yeah, that'd be at least a good 70-80% of the times we've interacted. If not more. You could say that for most of the people I've ever talked to. Hostile is my default setting, kinda hard for it not to be when I'm expecting an attack at any second."

"So you'd say the two of you had a negative relationship?"

Consideration.

"Nah, not sure I'd say that. Somehow we're still friends after all the shit we've been through. Probably wasn't the greatest relationship in any sense of the word, but you work with what you've got."

"Would you say your behavior with him ever crossed a line?"

"Oh several. You'll have to tell me which line you're talking about here."

"Do you think what you did could ever have been considered bullying?"

"For sure. Not even 'could have ever been considered' that's straight up what it was. Sometimes it was fighting, mostly depended on what shit he'd pulled recently, but most of the time it was me being a dick."

Katsuki's answer was honest and said with a vocal shrug in his tone.

"Would you say you ever put his life at risk?"

"Hard to say. I mean, never purposefully, but there was definately a few times that I got on board with a really stupid plan that could've killed us both. Like the time we were seven and somehow he convinced me that it was a great idea to try and sneak into what we were pretty sure was a villain hideout. Not to mention the dumbass shit he's pulled trying to follow me to one situation or another."

That apparently wasn't the answer that the defense lawyer had been hoping for. It was however, an answer that Tsunagu had quite a few questions about. Namely, how had Izuku managed to talk Katsuki into that, and how were they both still alive.

"Did you ever purposefully put him or anyone else at risk of serious harm?"

"Oh yeah, of course."

The whole room froze, shocked by that answer before Katsuki continued. Mischief was sparkling in his eyes.

"I mean, not him, but I've fought villains on.... okay I think we're at five separate occasions now. Like, Sludge Villain, assholes at USJ, the I-island stuff, getting kidnapped at training camp, and then I'm counting actually escaping from being kidnapped as a separate one because I was facing different assholes. I wasn't playing nice when those guys were trying to kill me and my classmates. Obviously I wasn't out to kill anyone, but serious harm was fair game."

The smirk on Katsuki's face when he replied made the whole picture. He was aware that that wasn't what the defense lawyer had meant, but he was having fun anyways. With how the defense lawyer was gritting their teeth, he was winning.

"Sorry, let me clarify, have you ever purposefully put him or anyone else at risk of serious harm outside of heroics related activities?"

"There's not much else going on in my life outside of heroics, but nah, not really. I think the closest thing was when I'd offer for some of the other kids that followed me around to test out the abandoned house I'd filled with deadly traps so they could practice too. I wasn't trying to put them at risk, and none of them ever took me up on it, but I probably should've known better than to offer."

Again, not the answer the defense lawyer had wanted. They seemed frustrated and cast a quick glance back to where Mitsuki and Masaru Bakugou were sitting, looking just as angry.

The whole line of questioning was odd at best. If anything, they should be asking Katsuki to recount specific acts of bullying while trying to suppress his intentions or reasoning. This general approach wouldn't hold up. It was as if they thought Katsuki had genuinely set out to murder people.

Looking over to his mother, taking in her confused and angry expression, it hit Tsunagu that that was exactly what she thought. This had been her plan the entire time, to try and expose Katsuki for a violent nature he didn't have.

Tsunagu stared at her for a long moment, watching the rage contort her face as Katsuki kept answering questions. She genuinely thought she was right in what she had done. That her actions had somehow been justified, that there was any way to justify doing that to a child. Her glare was filled with jealousy, a look of injustice. As if Katsuki was somehow in the wrong, even after everything that had come to light today.

In that moment, it struck him that she didn't see a human when she looked at Katsuki. There was no trace of regret, compassion, or care in her gaze. He had never been a child to her. Instead, Katsuki had been a possession, something to own and shape to her liking. Another piece of the world that should have warped to her will.

Now here he was proving her wrong. Rejecting her control to take his life back. Revealing her for the villain she was. Refusing to back down from her or become what she had tried to make him.

Maybe she'd gotten one thing right after all, Katsuki was uncontrollable. He could not be shifted from his course by any force but that of his own will. Not by her endless punishments, not by chains, not by poisonous offers of freedom, and not by the threat of death itself. What controlled him was his own desire to be better. A desire to do more, be more, learn, grow and change. Katsuki could be guided by others only because he allowed himself to be.

Mitsuki Bakugou had done everything in her power to break Katsuki. To take control of him, to possess him, but she couldn't. Nobody could. All she did was temporarily delay him. As had everyone else who'd made the same mistake.

He let his eyes trail off of her to look back to the teenager on the stand, who was now gleefully explaining an extremely mundane event to the exasperated defense lawyer in as much detail as possible. Delayed, but still heading in the right direction. Despite her every attempt Katsuki was still going strong, and he wouldn't be walking alone anymore. Tsunagu would be sure of that.

"Thank you for that... detailed account, Katsuki. To move us along, have you ever purposely destroyed another person's property against their will, again, outside of heroics activities?"

That question seemed to somber Katsuki a little. Odd. Nonetheless he replied without hesitation, though his tone was more serious now.

"Yes. Twice."

Less times than Tsunagu had, but it felt like there was something more to it than that. The lawyer appeared to think so too. Glancing around the courtroom, it seemed Izuku had tensed.

"Could you tell us about those two times? Did either involve Izuku by any chance?"

“Both times the object in question was one of his many notebooks which I burned. The first time was entirely justified and fair, the second time was me being a dick.”

“Please elaborate on those incidents for the court.”

Katsuki seemed unamused by the smirk on the defense lawyer’s face, but did as he was asked.

“Well the second time was the worse of the two, so I’ll start with that. From like... when we were 6 or 7 till the last year of middle school Izuku would go track down active villain fights to watch and take notes. He almost got himself killed several times when we were younger because he got too close. I would know, I was the one who had to stop him from getting killed most of the time. Anyways, he’d write whatever down in one of his mini notebooks and then transfer it over to his archive later. He had it on his desk in class when we did the whole ‘talk about your future’ in class. I was already in a pretty bad mood from my mother trying to fuck with my application for U.A., and then he piped up and said he was going to take the U.A. exam too.”

For a moment, Katsuki paused. His eyes were contemplative, considering. Still, he let out a sigh and kept telling the story.

“At the time, he hadn’t found his quirk yet. He also had never taken a combat training course in his life, and he could barely get through our PE class without fainting. U.A.’s entrance exam is the most dangerous practical test of any school. Prospective students have gotten severe injuries in the past, and while they were always able to treat them there thanks to Recovery Girl, it didn’t mean it wasn’t dangerous. Even for students who are well prepared, it can go wrong so easily. I’d been watching Izuku almost die our entire childhood, and I lost my shit at hearing him say he was going to ‘just try it’. Picked a fight with him about it, told him he might as well go jump off a building since that was a less risky choice, and burned his notebook. It was messed up. Between that and the Sludge Villain later in the day, I basically gave up trying to keep him safe from his own bad choices. I didn’t know what to do, so I left him alone to face whatever happened. In the end, he actually trained for it, found his quirk and didn’t die.”

He paused again, making up his mind on something.

“Though for the record, he did break three of his four limbs during that exam which lasted a grand total of fifteen minutes. We’ve talked about the whole mess since then. I was being a total dick at the time, but I wasn’t wrong to be upset either. I just expressed my concern in the only way I knew how, which coincidentally was the worst possible way. I can’t take it back, and I’m not going to pretend it didn’t happen, but I’m not repeating that mistake either.”

The defense lawyer seemed unsure how to handle that response, pausing for several seconds before finding their footing.

“So you can honestly say you wouldn’t have done that if given the chance to do it over again?”

A long silence filled the courtroom as Katsuki’s eyes narrowed at the defense lawyer, though he seemed more confused than upset.

“...What kind of question is that? If I don’t have any of my current memories, then no, I wouldn’t change anything. How would I know to? If I were to get sent back with all my memories of course I’m not going to fucking get on his case about the entrance exam. I’m going to tell him time travel is real, then tell him as many important future events as I can. If I’m there permanently, I’m going straight to U.A., using natural disasters to prove I know the future and warning them about shit that’s going to happen. Forget that entire conversation, I’m telling them where the nomu factory and villains’ weird bar is. ”

The confused indignation at the question was almost enough to make Tsunagu break down laughing for the second time. It was a damn near thing. The tension in the courtroom had shattered with reactions ranging from rolled eyes to Aizawa quietly burying his face in his hands.

“I- That wasn’t.” A long sigh from the defense lawyer before they shook their head and got back on track. “Moving on, could you tell us about the first time you burned one of Izuku’s notebooks, the time you said was justified?”

Katsuki perked up at that, while Izuku turned red for the third or fourth time today. Oh. This was going to be interesting.

“Yeah, I’ll absolutely stand by this one. So I mentioned that Izuku likes to write shit down. Well, one of his favorite things to write about is quirks; he’s got notebooks and notebooks filled to the brim with info on quirks, heroes and villains. It’s scary how much info he has on some of ‘em. Now as I’ve mentioned, he had no concept of boundaries when we were kids. If he was interested in something, he’d run straight into a villain attack to get a closer look. He was always particularly fascinated with my quirk though, partially because it’s damn cool and partially because I was an easy target for his research.”

Ah. Yeah, this made sense. It would be dangerous to have an entire notebook listing your strengths and weaknesses floating around, and Tsunagu could understand why Katsuki would burn such a thing. Taking another look at Izuku he had taken a cue from Aizawa and also now had his face in his hands, though a strong blush was still visible. Seemed like a bit of an overreaction for just

having been curious.

“For the most part I put up with it. Some of it was flattering. At most I’d tell him off or spark at him, even when he’d pull shit like taking samples of my sweat without asking first or licking my fingers to see if it tasted like caramel, also without warning me. However, when we were 12, I found out he had an entire notebook dedicated to my quirk, that was almost filled up and included everything from concentrations changes based on my mood, to theories about how it worked, and an entire section charting out the strength of my explosions. That was somewhat creepy, but I was used to it by that point. I didn’t burn it until I got to a section where he had theories regarding the medicinal uses of nitroglycerin, particularly one of the less common uses, which I will not be repeating here. As I started reading the third page on that theory, he came back to his room and saw I’d found the notebook.”

Oh. OH. Well. That would certainly explain Izuku’s reaction.

“I made eye contact with him, burned it to a damn crisp, then left without saying anything. We haven’t spoken of it since. I don’t know if he remade the journal after that, and I don’t want to.”

“...I-... That would make sense. Let’s move on.”

Several more minutes passed of the defense lawyer trying to expose Katsuki and failing because there wasn’t anything to expose. Katsuki was who he had always been, no matter how hard they tried to make him something else. Their frustration with him grew, as did that of his parents. Teeth clenched tighter and tighter. Eyes narrowing further. Shoulders raising in tension. All while Katsuki remained perfectly calm, posture lax, looking almost disinterested. As if he had already said everything he was interested in saying.

Finally, they hit the boiling point.

“Can you honestly, without remorse, say you would be happy without the two people that raised you? That you want to leave your family behind? That you don’t love your parents?”

The judge opened her mouth to interject that that question was completely inappropriate, but Katsuki got there first. At some point his eyes had shifted off the defense lawyer to look behind him. Straight at her, meeting her icey crimson glare with his own fiery one. Identical in color, but opposite in every other way. His head was held high, his voice was even, and his gaze never wavered as he replied.

“Yep.”

A single word that told a thousand stories.

It shattered her. If her husband hadn’t grabbed her shoulders, she might’ve attacked him then and there. As it was she lurched towards him, but he didn’t flinch. Hawk’s feathers were in between the two the moment she moved. He held her gaze through them.

Seconds ticked by before the stunned judge recovered herself enough to call for order and everyone resettled back to their places.

After that, the case wrapped up smoothly. The defense had no questions left and no additional evidence to submit. Katsuki made his way off the stand and straight to Tsunagu’s side where he was quickly wrapped up into a hug. Now that Katsuki was in his arms he could feel him shaking. His breathing was even, and his gaze was as determined as ever, but this had not been an easy experience.

Everyone in the room knew what the outcome of the case would be. Tsunagu still let out a breath of relief as the judge announced the final ruling. Mitsuki and Masaru Bakugou were unfit as guardians and full custody of Katsuki was transferred to Tsunagu Hakamata, effective immediately. In a day’s time they would retrieve the rest of Katsuki’s possessions, neither Bakugou was allowed to be present for the process. An officer would be there to supervise instead. Signing the last of the paperwork took less than five minutes.

It was over.

The media was easier to brave a second time, apparently Present Mic had ducked outside with Kugo to give the gathered crowd a harsh talking to. Mic was also very well liked by the media, so his warning carried a lot of weight. Between that and Hawk’s feathers it was easy for everyone to return to their respective cars.

They weren’t going far, just to U.A. where they were safe from media and villains alike. Almost everyone met them there, save for Edgeshot and Kamui Woods, who had someone else to meet. The security detail was technically finished, but Hawks and Kugo decided to come along anyways. No harm in numbers after all. Both of them had already cleared their schedules for the day, as there was no telling how long the case would last.

When they arrived at U.A. lunch was already waiting for them, though Katsuki had brought his own. Nobody missed that he was eating a different meal, but no comments were made. It was something he'd need to keep an eye on, but for now, anything that made Katsuki feel safer was fine by him.

At some point, a heated debate had been broke out between Izuku and Kirishima of all people. The end result was all four children out on a training field engaging in what seemed like a game of reverse tag with odd rules. Meanwhile, the adults and Hawks were half keeping their eye on them and half talking among themselves.

It was nice watching them have fun, and his conversation with Kugo was also pleasant. Catching up on all the little things that had happened over the past few days, until a soft voice interrupted them.

“Mr. Hakamata?”

He turned to see Inko Midoriya standing behind him, a polite smile on her face.

“Sorry to bother you, but I have to head out soon and I would love to speak with you for a moment first.”

“Ah, of course. Excuse me, Kugo.” As he spoke he stood up, following her a ways off from the rest of the group. They could still see the children from their new location, and for a few seconds they both watched in silence as Katsuki rocketed himself around a suddenly formed pillar of ice.

“I worry about them a lot. Hero work, it’s so dangerous. They’re still so young and it’s already like the whole world is out to get them.” After a beat she let out a light laugh. “Though I suppose you already know all about that.”

Her smile was wistful, eyes focused on something far off in the distance. With a gentle nod he waited for her to keep speaking. Letting out a small sigh she did just that.

“I’ve known Katsuki since he was born. There’s a million little things about him I feel I ought to tell you, but it’s not really my place to. I’m sure you’ll find them on your own with time. For now...”

Inko considered her words carefully. Both of them were still looking out over the field. Somehow Hawks had been roped into the game, laughing as he dodged around Izuku.

“Katsuki isn’t good with starting conversations, but he responds wonderfully if you talk to him. Often times, the problem is just his brain running on a different track from everyone else’s. His choices make sense from his perspective, but people so rarely try to see the world through his eyes. I’m sure you’ve already figured that out, it’s just-.” She sighed again. “Promise me you’ll listen to him. Even when you’re frustrated with him or his actions seem incomprehensible, you won’t assume he’s being unreasonable. Promise me you’ll ask him for his side of the story, and when he tells you, that you’ll listen?”

It was such a simple thing to do, something that so many people in Katsuki’s life had failed to do. Not anymore though.

“I promise. I’ve learned that lesson well. It took me longer than it should’ve, but I won’t make those mistakes again.”

“Hopefully none of us will.”

There was silence again for perhaps a minute or so before she glanced at her phone for the time.

“Ah, I’m sorry, I’ve got to head out now. All-Might promised he’d walk Izuku back for me so I won’t be picking him up later, but we should have tea sometime.” Then she was bustling off and he was slowly returning to the table where everyone else was waiting. Pretending they hadn’t been watching the exchange.

People were still chattering around him, but he found himself staring silently instead of resuming his conversation with Kugo. Watching as Hawks squawked in alarm, finally caught by Katsuki in a burst of speed. The teenager laughed at the reaction, overtaking Hawks before flipping mid-air to jet off in another direction. His friends starting after him after only a moment’s pause.

He looked young. Like any other child out playing games. It was a nice sight.

Eventually, it was time to go home. Goodbyes were said, future plans half-made, teasing words exchanged. Katsuki was quiet as they rode back together, but for once it wasn’t a tense quiet. It was a tired, content sort of quiet. His eyes started drooping close as the car rumbled along. Less than five minutes passed before Katsuki shifted in his seat to lean on his new guardian’s shoulder,

allowing himself to be wrapped up in a firm hug. He was out like a light not long after. After the day he'd had, it wasn't a surprise that he was so tired. Even when they arrived, he didn't wake up, staying in a light sleep as he was carefully carried up into the apartment and into his bedroom. It only took a minute to carefully take off his gloves and put them by the bedside before tucking him in.

For a while, he stood in the doorway to watch his new son sleep. To assure himself this wasn't a dream, Katsuki wasn't going to disappear.

He'd finally been returned home safely.

Tsunagu Hakamata was satisfied at last, his mission complete. Tomorrow there'd be new challenges to face, but for a moment, he let himself be happy with a job well done.

Chapter End Notes

Do you ever get so upset about a character's treatment in canon that you write an entire novel to fix it?

Anyways like I mentioned there will be an epilogue at some point, and I've got plans for oneshots later in the series, but this is the story I set out to tell. I didn't think this fic was going to get as long as it did or get as much positive attention as it did, but here we are! Thank you all for being so sweet, it's really been the highlight of my day to see all these nice comments and reactions to my work.

Since a few people have asked me about it, I absolutely do not mind and would love to see if anyone makes fanart/writes fanfiction for this universe. I've made the "Katsuki Hakamata AU" tag which is what I'll be using on here and on [my tumblr](#). Absolutely use that tag and/or send things to me if you make them, I'd love to see them.

For anyone wondering about the medicinal uses of Nitroglycerin, you can [check out wikipedia](#) at your own risk.

I've also had a lot of people leaving me their discords, to keep up with that I've gone ahead and made a little server [right here!](#) It's a place to chill and talk about fandom stuff and whatnot. Anyone is welcome to join, there's no complicated rules system or anything. Just be kind.

Snapshots

Chapter Notes

Hello Y'alll it's epilogue time.

There are specific warnings for a few drabbles, they are noted just under the title.

Each new drabble is marked by *Title. There are 13 total.

No particular chronological order to them, just based on when I wrote them. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*Names

When Katsuki had finally gone back to school again, he'd been somewhat relieved. Not that summer hadn't been fun. Or, well, disregarding the first two weeks, it'd been fun. Best and worst summer of his life in equal measure. Still, he was ready to get back into his training. He was at his best when he had structure to his life and a goal to work towards.

Moving into the dorms went about as well as could be expected. Now he was finally settled in and ready to start on the first assignment of the year, two pages of math homework from Ectoplasm.

It was a simple assignment. He had studied this stuff already so it should be easy. Most of it was review from last year too.

Unfortunately, he'd been sitting here for the past 10 minutes stumped at the first question.

It shouldn't have been a question. It wouldn't be for anyone else. For Katsuki though, it was one of the hardest questions he'd been asked in quite some time. Crimson eyes glared at the words that dared make him stumble.

"Name: _____"

Several times he moved his pen to make a stroke before aborting the movement.

In the end he skipped the name line to fill out the actual questions on the page. Those only took him half an hour total. Simple stuff really.

When he finished he was left staring at the top of the page again.

Ectoplasm would know it was him if he just put down Katsuki. Right? He wouldn't get on his case about it.

Somehow it felt wrong. Even if it shouldn't mean anything.

After a few more seconds of hesitating, Katsuki said fuck it. Before he could change his mind he brought his pen up to neatly write in "Katsuki Hakamata". The second kanji took a little longer to write, it wasn't one he was familiar with, but he managed.

As the ink dried on the page he moved on to his next assignment.

Writing it was easier the second time. More natural.

By the second week of school, he stopped pausing.

Katsuki didn't introduce himself to others all that often. Usually, he wasn't interested in interacting with people he didn't know. If forced to, someone else would introduce him.

People at school people already knew his name. If they hadn't heard of him before the training camp, they certainly had afterwards. When Class 1-A took to calling him Katsuki at school, everyone else quickly followed suit. Izuku still called him 'Kacchan', and his classmates tried that nickname a few times when they thought they could get away with it (they couldn't). Nobody brought it up with him. Nobody made a big deal about calling him by his first name. Even the teachers did it without him asking.

It was nice to have something about the whole situation be easy. The problem was, when he had to introduce himself again, he hadn't had any practice. Weeks had passed by since the name had become his, but he hadn't said it aloud yet. Not until one day when he was off-campus.

He'd been heatedly debating with a girl about support weapon advances in a coffee shop he sometimes frequented. The two of them had been going back and forth for the past half hour, having an excellent time of it until she'd paused to ask his name.

Fuck, he'd been quiet for way too long. The longer he waited the more it was going to look like he was lying or a villain. Twice his mouth opened. When his words finally came, his voice was weaker than he would've liked.

"Katsuki."

There was an awkward pause after that. One of the many, many things he was slowly making progress on was not defaulting to anger. Don't need to get hostile with her for asking. Don't need to tell her everything either. Just give a quick explanation to move the conversation along. Right.

"Sorry, the name thing is a bit complicated for me right now."

She smiled understandingly. The conversation moved on. Katsuki could breathe again.

The next introduction was a formal one. Some politicians touring U.A. or something like that. In all honesty Katsuki didn't care. He just wanted to go back to class, but they had been told to play nice. The top two from each class were told to wait in the gym to meet whoever it was, and unfortunately that included him. Between the dorms cutting down on travel time and no longer wasting a good chunk of his day dealing with his family situation, he'd managed to outdo Tenya to claim second in the class.

For the most part, that was a good thing.

Right now though, it meant he had to introduce himself to some strangers. He'd talked about this with his therapist already, but being in the moment was different. Of course he could still introduce himself as Katsuki if he wanted to. His teachers would back him up on it, and he was sure that the politicians had heard of him already. None of them were going to question shit, not after the media debacle anyways.

Katsuki didn't want to introduce himself like that though. Backing down from a challenge wasn't his style. Besides, he'd have to get used to it eventually.

So when Momo had finished and all eyes turned to him, he dipped his head politely, held out a hand and spoke before he could overthink it any further.

"Katsuki Hakamata, second in class."

He shook hands with a few people, nodded politely as he was told names he didn't bother to remember, and then the group was moving on to the older heroics courses. Nobody commented on his name choice, but he could feel Aizawa's proud gaze on him as he walked them back to class.

*Dad

The first time he called Tsunagu 'Dad' was an accident.

Well, okay, no, not really. He meant it as a joke. Sort of.

Tsunagu had reminded him to take a jacket when he was heading out to meet Eijirou and Mina. There was a bit of a chill to the air, but Katsuki didn't use a jacket unless snow was coming down. He ran hot.

Being who he was, he couldn't let that slide without a sarcastic remark. Though his tone was good natured, it held a teasing edge to it.

"It's only going to be like 18 degrees out. I'll be fine, *Dad*."

Now, calling someone dad or mom sarcastically when they were fretting over you worked in a lot of cases. Like how most of the class had taken to calling Aizawa that when he was worrying. It did not, however, work when that person was actually kind of your parent.

Katsuki was out the door and three steps down the hallway before he realized what he'd said.

By the time he'd reached his friends, his face was still bright red. Of course they had to know why.

"So, wait, you're embarrassed because you accidentally called your dad, 'dad'?"

Mina was definitely fighting back laughter, unwilling to shrink back at Katsuki's death glare. Dammit. The downside to being a better person was people stopped being scared of you. Which was kinda the point, but people cowering in fear when you looked at them was convenient.

"Yes? No? I mean-. Fuck, I dunno." He threw his hands up in the air as they walked down the street together. "I've never called him that before! It just... feels weird."

"It's weird 'cause it wasn't what you were trying to say. Doing it on purpose is one thing, but it's another when you were trying to make a joke."

Had Katsuki mentioned how much of a saint Eijirou was? Because he abso-fucking-lutely was. All he could do was nod and gesture to his friend. Sometimes he was pretty sure the redhead knew his feelings better than he did. Speaking of which, a hand came up to lightly pat his back, the

movement telegraphed and slow enough that it didn't catch him by surprise. A few seconds of silence ticked by while they walked, until Mina spoke up again, her tone more sympathetic this time.

"Well, I wouldn't worry about it if I were you! I mean, he probably didn't even notice. Even if he did, I'm sure it wasn't a big deal."

She was right. Katsuki had been facing the door when he'd said it, so there was every chance Tsunagu hadn't heard him. The conversation moved on naturally as they walked, and Katsuki put the slip-up from that morning to the back of his mind.

Months passed by. While he didn't exactly forget about the incident, he did have more important things to think about . It fell to the wayside, until it suddenly became relevant again.

He and Tsunagu had been out walking together when Tsunagu had been pulled away by a phone call. Around the same time, he'd been spotted by Fumikage who was out walking with his parents. The bird was one of the few people he would sometimes seek the company of outside of his idiot squad. Really he was on better terms with all of his classmates, but Fumikage was one of the ones he actively enjoyed spending time with. They had similar styles, and it helped that Fumikage understood what it felt like to have a hard to control quirk. Not to mention their shared internship.

They spent a few minutes chatting until Tsunagu had finally finished up with his phone call. Just a sidekick needing clarification on patrol routes. An awkward beat passed when he caught up to the group, Fumikage's parents looking towards Katsuki for an explanation on who this stranger was. Oh. It was the first time he'd needed to introduce Tsunagu. A moment longer ticked by until he mentally shook himself and quickly gathered his thoughts.

"Forgot some people haven't met him yet. This is my dad, Tsunagu Hakamata. Dad, this is Fumikage. He's the other 1-A kid interning with Hawks."

Just like that, the conversation moved on. Before too long Fumikage had to leave. It was about time for them to start heading home too.

They didn't talk about it. Not exactly anyways. He could feel the pride radiating off of Tsunagu, and that told him everything he needed to know.

It got more comfortable as time went on. Soon enough he didn't need to think about it at all.

***Dad (pt 2)**

Alright, so calling Kugo the moment he regained the ability to move wasn't exactly the most reasonable response to something this small, but whatever.

Tsunagu was having feelings and he needed to talk to someone else about them.

Thankfully Kugo picked up after only two rings. Hopefully he wasn't on patrol right now.

"Hey Tsu, everything okay?"

"He called me Dad."

"... Do you want me to come over?"

"Please."

It only took about 20 minutes for Kugo to get over to his apartment. Katsuki had been planning to be out for at least a few hours, so Tsunagu at least had time to process this emotionally. After letting himself in, Kugo settled on the armchair in the room that Tsunagu had bought with him in mind ages ago.

"Alright, what happened?"

"I don't think he even meant it, like, you know, that. He was just being sarcastic and I'm not sure he even noticed that he said it, but..."

Raising his arms he made several vague gestures Kugo smiled fondly at.

"Ahhhh. So now you're not sure what to do in response."

More vague gestures at the air that he hoped properly communicated the depth of his complex emotions about the matter. He did not appreciate the amused snort he got in reply. This was a very serious situation and it needed to be treated as such.

"Easy enough, don't bring it up. If he didn't notice it'll probably just embarrass him, if he did notice he's probably already embarrassed about it. One of these days he'll be ready to call you dad properly, just gotta wait for it."

That was fair and rational, and Tsunagu knew that he should take the advice, but instead he found himself worrying about all the little what ifs. Kugo knew him well enough to pull him out of it.

"No sense in stressing out over it." He paused. "Hey, do you know what's up with this wave of freshly graduated heroes? I've been chatting with a couple of other pros and everyone's been seeing the same weird costume design choices. At first it was just a triangle pattern but now It's starting to get annoying since it seems they've got an obsession with spandex."

Just like that his mind was off the topic and instead he had launched into a rant about a particular support company that had been making the rounds recently.

A few months later, he found himself going straight to the hero group chat after returning home from his walk with Katsuki. It'd been hard enough to hold himself together for the remainder of the walk, but now that he was in the privacy of his bedroom he completely melted.

Best Jeanist: !!!!

Best Jeanist: He Introduced Me As His Dad

Best Jeanist: We were out on a walk through one of the usual parks, and we met one of his classmates, the one interning under Hawks with him, Fumikage.

Best Jeanist: Fumikage parents were there as well, and He Introduced Me As His Dad.

Gang Orca: How are you handling it?

Best Jeanist: I'm lying on my bed right now and trying very hard to not post on social media about how much I love my son because that would embarrass him, but also I want to.

Eraserhead: weak

Present Mic: Shouta, dearest, love, really?

Eraserhead: dont say it

Present Mic: The first time Hitoshi called him Dad he called me and cried about it for three hours.

Eraserhead: i want a divorce.

Present Mic: I've also found him lying on the couch in the teachers lounge unresponsive after one of the class 1-A kids started the joke of referring to him as 'Dad' instead of Sensei whenever he got too mother-hen with them.

Present Mic: All-Might was worried that he'd finally gone into a coma.

Present Mic: It still makes him emotional when they do it, I'm pretty sure at least a few of them have figured that out.

Present Mic: They got his third year class in on it too, Mirio even got Tamaki to do it once.

Eraserhead: how hard is it to fake your death

Snipe: Actually not hard if you put your mind to it.

Snipe: Hard part is settin' up a new identity

Best Jeanist: He did call me Dad sarcastically once, and I panicked a bit about that, but this was?

Real?

Best Jeanist: I'm just

Best Jeanist: Wondering how I got this lucky

Best Jeanist: Gotta go, time to start on dinner.

He went to turn off his phone, but paused. After a few seconds of hovering, he moved his finger to open his contacts instead. It only took a moment for him to find the one he wanted. He hadn't edited the name since the first time.

-> Katsuki

This time he wasn't deleting anything, this time he just needed to add something.

-> Katsuki Hakamata

Hitting save, Tsunagu let himself smile as he pushed himself to his feet. Part of him wanted to linger on the moment a little longer, but he could hear clanking in the kitchen. His son had already started cooking, and it'd be awful rude to keep him waiting.

*Rules

As Katsuki was an older teenager, Tsunagu didn't have to worry about setting up many household

rules with him. The boy was practically self-sufficient already. He cleaned up after himself, he didn't eat junk food, he kept a healthy sleep schedule, and he didn't get himself into trouble.

Really there weren't any rules, more like agreements between them. Some were unspoken, both of them knocked before they entered the other's bedroom. Katsuki had noticed the careful order to the books around the house and always tucked anything he read back where he had found it. Tsunagu never moved Katsuki's things from where he left them unless he had permission.

Some of the agreements were more explicit. The first of which had to be carefully navigated not long after the trial had ended. While Katsuki wasn't exactly eager to go running off on his own after everything he'd been through, he obviously couldn't stay inside for the entire summer. Already he seemed a bit cooped up in the apartment. Katsuki was a wanderer at heart, and though he knew rationally he was safest staying home, rational didn't stop desire. It didn't help that Tsunagu would need to return to his hero work soon.

It took a long evening of talking out what was realistic with all risks considered. In the end though, they reached a plan that they could both agree on. For the first two weeks, Katsuki would stay in the apartment building unless he was accompanied by Tsunagu or another pro-hero. Too many of the League of Villain's members were still unaccounted for, not to mention they had a warper among them. Besides, with all the media attention focused on him, Katsuki wasn't eager to be alone in public spaces. After that, if everything had cooled off, he would be fine as long as he had at least two of his friends with him and a GPS tracker on him. Any public places were safe, text Tsunagu when he left and once he got back, and steer clear of any isolated or high-villain activity locations.

The tracker had been one of the harder parts of the discussion. As much as Tsunagu wanted to respect Katsuki's privacy, and under any other circumstances he would never consider a GPS tracker for his child, the risk of a secondary kidnapping was too high. Katsuki understood, it wasn't about trust, it was about safety. It wasn't forever either, only for the summer. He also had the ability to turn off the tracker if he felt the need to, though doing so would send Tsunagu an alert. They had two codewords in place, one for if Katsuki had just wanted the tracker off, one for if he had been forced to turn it off. No text after turning it off meant Tsunagu assumed the worst. He could also trigger an emergency mode on the device that would make it appear off while sending out an SOS.

Luckily, there was a gym within apartment building with an area reserved for quirk use. So Katsuki would be able to keep up with his training, and have an outlet to burn off steam. It wasn't perfect, but they made it work.

Other agreements were spoken, but easier. Katsuki asked Tsunagu not to poke around under his bed or in the back of his closest, even if Katsuki had asked him to get something from his room. The quiet implications of the request didn't go unnoticed, that he trusted Tsunagu enough to tell him where things were hidden. Trusted him to let Katsuki have his secrets. Even after Katsuki moved to the dorms, Tsunagu was careful to avoid those locations. When Katsuki had brought home paper made from nettle fibers, he had noticed Tsunagu's instant aversion to it. It was hard to explain, but Tsunagu managed to communicate the general idea, the fiber felt wrong. Set him on edge. The paper vanished and Katsuki didn't bring home anything made of nettle again.

Touching was a mix of the two. Usually, Katsuki preferred to be asked, verbally or non-verbally, before he was touched. Hair ruffling or shoulder touches were fine, anything like a hug and Tsunagu would ask. Sometimes asking meant a verbal question, sometimes it meant making the motion obvious and pausing before contact, allowing Katsuki to either move into the touch or away from it. The rare times that Katsuki went unresponsive, due to nightmares, panic or being

overwhelmed, contact was preferred as long as his quirk wasn't going off. If his quirk was going off, no contact until he had calmed himself enough to control it. Each part of his comfort zone took time to learn, toeing boundaries carefully, and mistakes made, but they figured it out step by step.

Really, one could say that for almost any part of their lives. It was never clear cut, some things were spoken about, some things were left unsaid. Often things weren't perfect, nothing ever was. They figured it out though. Step by step. Mistake by mistake. Agreement by agreement.

*Scarves

One of the many suggestions in the self-help books Katsuki had been working his way through was picking up a hobby. Something to do with your hands to help keep calm. Ideally something unrelated to your work or sources of stress.

Katsuki had his artwork, but that was too private to count. Too much a part of his past to take his mind off it. He wasn't interested in much else outside of heroics work. Hiking might've counted, he did enjoy spending time in nature. When there was nothing around him but trees and birds, that was when he could really relax. Or it used to be relaxing. Now just the idea of being alone out in the woods made his stomach turn. It'd been less than three weeks since he'd been kidnapped, and Katsuki wasn't dumb. He could still hear All for One's words haunting him. Telling the Handsy Fucker to keep trying.

Deep breaths he had to remind himself. Deep breaths and focus on something else.

Looking around the apartment, he was hit by the amount of yarn present. Tsunagu used it for practice or experimenting with new fiber types. Most of it was tucked away neatly in one of a few locations, some of it was on the shelves, next to the books like decorations.

His mother had always hated knitwear. She thought it was the ugliest thing in existence. If Katsuki was being honest, he wasn't too fond of it either. The idea of having two large needles in his hands was appealing though.

Tsunagu was at work, would be for a few more hours. A little bit of searching, both online and around the apartment and he had everything he needed.

Getting the motions down took him longer than he thought it would, but before long he had created a particularly ugly square. Or, well, it was square shaped. Kinda. Not really.

It was ugly, completely useless, and not particularly nice to the touch either. He loved it.

That particular square went in his blue lockbox, the one that protected all his treasured possessions. What few photos he had from his childhood, the few old drawings he'd managed to save, and mementos. It'd been getting fuller recently. There'd been more memories he wanted to hold onto.

He made a few more squares after that, but didn't keep them. Instead he unraveled each one and did it over until they looked neat. Then he unrevealed them again, spooling the thread back up carefully. Tsunagu got home not long after he'd finished picking apart his third one and moved back to his worksheets instead.

The needles and yarn were still on coffee table. His laptop was still next to it, with patterns opened and easily visible. Katsuki had a strong urge to slam it shut. Hide away any interest in anything. Don't let them know you care or it'll be taken from you. Eyes and focus forcibly on his worksheet, Katsuki fought down his instinctive panic. He was allowed to have interests now. Tsunagu wasn't going to mock him for them or try to take them away.

Green eyes took in the objects on the table, then Katsuki's tense posture. When Tsunagu spoke, his voice was purposefully conversational as he took off his coat and hung it up.

"You know, I've tried to pick up knitting a few times. It always struck me as the sort of thing I should be able to do, but I'm just awful at it."

That got his attention, fear dissipating in favor of confusion.

"Wait, shouldn't your quirk make it easy?"

There was a slight smile on Tsunagu's face as he shook his head, moving to set his bag down on the kitchen table.

"You'd think so, but it actually made it near impossible. I can make the knots without the needles, but when I'm using a needle I end up getting distracted and tangling everything. I'm too used to using my quirk to move thread I suppose."

Huh. Weird. He shrugged and turned his eyes back to his worksheet.

"Guess that makes sense, it'd be like me messing with fireworks."

The conversation moved on. A few days passed before Katsuki picked up the needles again. Tsunagu had pulled out a few books with instructions and patterns in them. While the internet was great, it was also nice to have pages in front of him. Out of curiosity he looked at the patterns for scarves. Several seemed quite simple. Before long he'd picked one which looked easy enough but would kill some time. After reading through an explanation on yarn weights, collecting what he'd need, and settling down on the couch, Katsuki got started.

It took him about three days to complete. He'd wanted it to be long and tall, and he still had his worksheets to get through. Not to mention his friends stopping by. He didn't hide the project from them either. As far as he could tell, Izuku had noticed that he'd picked up the hobby. Shouto hadn't noticed the knitting supplies at all. The idiot squad didn't seem to realize it was Katsuki's project and not Tsunagu's.

Finally though, the scarf was done. Much like the first square Katsuki made, it was ugly as hell. At several points the stitchwork had gotten thrown off, either too many or too few stitches in a row making everything else after the mistake look wrong. The texture wasn't bad like some of his earlier squares, he'd used a softer yarn this time. That was about the only redeeming quality. Even the color looked bad. The yarn itself had looked pretty, the blues and greens had looked like a colorful pond on the spool. Now it had been forced into a vaguely scarf like shape, it looked murky. Like algae filled water. Or poorly mixed paint, if you were being kind.

Point was, the scarf was ugly.

When Tsunagu had noted it was finished, Katsuki had offered it to him *as a joke*.

He was supposed to have a good fashion sense! Or, at the very least a consistent one that did not involve ugly knitted scarves. Apparently though, Tsunagu didn't get the message.

Not only did he take the stupid ugly scarf, but as Katsuki discovered the next day in the class chat, he'd worn it out on patrol.

The media had gone into a frenzy over that stupid scarf. Not the news channels, but the gossip rags and just about every fashion magazine out there. There was all out war between those who (rightfully) thought it was ugly and he was wearing it ironically and those who (wrongly) thought it was somehow high fashion.

An argument further compounded by the fact it was the middle of fucking summer, and there was no goddamn reason for him to be wearing a heavy knit scarf at all. Particularly not over his hero costume jacket. He wasn't even using it to cover his face, which would at least make a tiny bit of sense. Nope, it was just carefully wrapped around his neck, over the hero costume collar.

Izuku had run his mouth in the chat because of course he had, so all of them knew Katsuki made it too. He didn't mind his classmates knowing that he'd taken up knitting, because if he was doing it then it was automatically badass, no questions asked. However, Katsuki didn't want them knowing he'd made something *that ugly*.

At first, he was sure this was meant as a passive aggressive taunt. There was no other reasonable explanation for why he would wear a scarf that ugly publicly. So Katsuki decided to respond passive aggressively and pretend he hadn't noticed the media shitstorm.

The problem was, Tsunagu decided to keep the game up. A week passed, and every day he had patrol he took the stupid scarf with him. Worse, the media apparently decided to play along and convinced people the scarf wasn't ugly. Blue and green knitted scarves were now somehow in fashion, and they were everywhere.

In the middle of summer.

People were fucking insane.

Another week passed, and Tsunagu was still wearing it. Most people had gotten used to the costume adjustment by now.

It was one the third day of the third week that Katsuki finally realized this wasn't meant as a passive aggressive way to mock him. For some insane reason, Tsunagu actually liked that awful, awful scarf. If it hadn't been fashion related, he could've asked Eijirou for help. Unfortunately, Eijirou also thought the scarf looked good, which was empirical proof it was ugly. That left Katsuki with only one person to call for advice. One person who might understand this insanity, because Katsuki sure as hell couldn't.

"Katsuki, dear, he likes it because you made it."

Several long seconds of silence passed as Kastuki's eyes narrowed at the wall as he tried to puzzle out what Auntie Inko just said.

"... Why would that make a difference? It's ugly, it shouldn't matter if I made it or not."

She sighed softly, though she didn't sound upset. More fond than anything else.

"Because you put time and effort into making it, and that does matter. Even if the scarf itself isn't very pretty, he likes it because it's a sign that you care. It's part of being a parent. I love all your and Izuku's old drawings from when you were little for the same reason."

Oh. That... kinda made sense. Maybe. It was still hard for him to believe. Several more seconds

ticked by before she spoke up, her voice kind as ever, even with a teasing edge.

“Are you still upset about it?”

“It’s just... so ugly. I didn’t think he’d actually wear it anywhere.”

“Why not make him a better one then? One that you’d be proud to see him wearing. His birthday is coming up, right? You could make him something that matches his hero outfit a little more.”

Thank fuck for Auntie Inko, she always had a solution for these sorts of situations. He hadn’t even considered that. It’d take him awhile to do it right, but he had plenty of free time.

“I think I’ll try that. Thanks Auntie.”

“Any time dear.”

After he hung up, he scooped up his laptop to start his research. He had lots of time before October, but this was going to be a big project. Katsuki didn’t like half-assing things after all. Even if Tsunagu was wearing that ugly scarf in the meantime, it didn’t bother Katsuki as much now he was working on fixing the situation.

Step one was practice. It took longer than he would’ve liked, but he learned to knit neatly and tightly. As he quickly discovered, tight stitches were harder for him, as the thick skin on his hands made the delicate work difficult, but he figured it out.

Step two was deciding exactly what he wanted to do. In the end, what he really wanted was something that looked nice but which also had practical uses. The back of his mind held onto images of Tsunagu bleeding out on that battlefield. They weren’t his primary motivator, but they lingered nonetheless when he looked over fiber choices. He reached out to Gang Orca, Kugo, for advice on Tsunagu’s power. Kugo told him which fibers were easiest for Tsunagu to manipulate and which were hardest, as well as other minor factors that affected his quirk. He’d only asked one question too.

“Is this about the scarf?”

“Yeah. Don’t tell him though.”

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t dream of it.”

Katsuki decided after the phone call that he liked Kugo. With his advice, and some help from Izuku, he moved to the next phase of his project.

Step three was getting the yarn, which proved the hardest part of the process. What he had in mind was highly specific and none of the materials were particularly easy to get outside of the denim. Not to mention finding someone to make the blend he needed. After asking around on a number of forums, he’d been directed to a woman who could spin almost anything. Getting synthetic spider silk and ballistic nylon fiber to her was a pain, but he managed in time. The finished yarn got to him just as school started up again. It was softer than he thought it’d be.

That left him at the final step, actually knitting the scarf. The pattern he’d picked was complicated, but he’d practiced it twice with a similarly weighted yarn and the second time it looked pretty good. Now he was back in school, he had less time to work on the scarf, but keeping the project a secret was much easier. When all was said and done, he finished up a week before Tsunagu’s birthday. All he had left was boxing it up nicely the day before.

As luck would have it, Tsunagu's birthday fell on a Sunday so they'd made plans to spend the day together. The box was tucked away in his backpack until it was almost time for them to head back.

Tsunagu seemed surprised, but he unwrapped the gift carefully. His movements slowed as he lifted off the box lid and saw the blue fabric. Red eyes found themselves fixed on the ground as Katsuki kicked his feet nervously. Before Katsuki could stop himself, he'd launched into an explanation.

"It's- I wasn't happy with the first one, but you wore it anyways so I wanted to make a better one. Something actually worth wearing." That didn't sound quite right, but he pressed on regardless.

"The yarn is a custom blend. Kugo said you do better with cotton blends, so that's the base. I had it mixed with spider silk and ballistic nylon fibers. Between that 'n the stitchwork it should be strong enough to take a bullet at three layers. Very least it outta be able to restrain just about anyone if you need it to. Shouldn't be too heavy either, I tried to be careful about that, but I figured resilient was more important."

He couldn't look up to see Tsunagu's reaction, but he didn't have to. Katsuki's rambling was cut off when he was pulled off into a hug. When had he started shaking?

"I love it."

It shouldn't have been so relieving to hear those words. There was nothing to fear in the first place. Tsunagu already liked the ugly one, so of course he'd like this one too. Katsuki still felt like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders.

This time when there was a flurry of media attention for the outfit change, Katsuki was ready for it. This time, he was proud to see his work on display. This time, he was the one who shared photos with his classmates, rather than Mina finding them on some gossip rag of a news site. Instead of that awful blue and green, this scarf was almost entirely blue. It fit in with the rest of Tsunagu's outfit, the color and texture blending nicely with the denim. The only part that didn't quite match was at the ends. He'd only added the little explosions on one side of the scarf, because it could be risky, even though everyone already knew he was Tsunagu's kid by this point. It didn't matter in the end, Tsunagu always wore it with the explosions showing.

Interestingly enough, it wasn't just the design that caught on in the fashion world this time. The scarf had done its job only two months later, a mere three layers stopping a bullet aimed at Tsunagu's heart. That got people interested in the fibers he'd used, and Katsuki was more than happy to share the blending information he and Izuku had complied for the project. Spider silk blends started showing up in hero costumes as the rest of the world caught on.

It was strange to see how much a scarf could change, in his life and the world.

Either way, Katsuki was glad he'd found a hobby. The books were right. He felt a lot less stressed by the time he'd finished his project. Maybe he'd try embroidery next.

*Fretting

The stupidest part of all of this, was Katsuki wasn't even that hurt.

Sure, breaking two ribs *sounded bad*, but they were barely hairline fractures. Despite this, it

seemed that everyone around him was convinced he was dying. Izuku might actually be having a heart attack.

"I'm fine! Just let me~"

His protests were halted when Aizawa pinned him with a glare and firmly pushed him back to the ground where he'd been told to lay.

"Kid, if you try getting up again I will have you on bed rest for a week regardless of how bad it is."

It wasn't like he was going to die or anything. Izuku got way worse than this on a weekly basis, and nobody batted an eye. But oh noooo, Katsuki broke a bone for once and all the sudden it's a huge deal.

Despite his verbal protests, Katsuki eventually resigned himself to his fate and stayed on the ground as he was carefully checked over.

"Alright, you can stand. Move as little as possible and you will let Kirishima and Uraraka help you to the infirmary."

His glare was ignored, because of course it was, but Katsuki pushed himself to his feet nonetheless. It didn't even hurt until he twisted himself a little, and even then it was hardly the worst pain he'd felt in his life. When Eijiro slid to one side to support him and Uraraka slid to the other, Katsuki fixed them both with a long look. Neither wavered.

"Fine, let's get this over with."

Getting to the infirmary took longer than it should've. He would've been fine to walk there at a normal pace, but his classmates insisted on taking it slowly, and unfortunately while Eijiro could sometimes be coerced into letting Katsuki have his way, Uraraka held firm.

Finally though, he arrived and was immediately pressed to one of the beds.

Of course, given his luck, Recovery Girl was out. She was helping at a hospital a few hours away and wouldn't be back until tomorrow. The substitute nurse was able to wrap his ribs, but couldn't heal them. Katsuki was stuck in the infirmary for the day to rest in preparation for getting healed tomorrow. Ugh.

At the very least it gave him time to work on his homework. Problem was, he didn't have much homework to finish. Katsuki had gotten most of it done ahead of time, he only had half an hour's worth remaining. After that he was left to his own devices.

His classmates came by after classes finished, and for once they were a welcome distraction. Eijiro had brought him his current embroidery project so he had something to do with his hands, and since he'd already done the homework he got pulled into tutoring the rest of his idiots through it too. In their own ways, each of them tried to treat him delicately. Katsuki rolled his eyes each time and fixed them with an unimpressed look. Finally, he couldn't take it any longer.

"I'm pretty sure everyone else in the class has gotten worse than before, and you lot don't pull this crap on them. I'm not on my damn deathbed, you know."

"It's different when you get hurt." Denki said quietly, his head carefully resting on Katsuki's stomach. Staring right at where he knew the injured ribs were.

"When the rest of us get hurt, it's 'cause we were doing something dumb. You only seem to get

hurt when the world's out to get you. It's scarier." Mina added, and that made a bit of sense.

Unlike the rest of them, Katsuki had learned most of his lessons about caution when he was a kid. Now he usually knew better. It was like how when kids grew up and realized they could eat an entire cake by themselves, and nobody could or would stop them. They needed the stomachache to learn why that was such a bad idea. Katsuki had learned that when he was 7 and left home alone for two weeks. With his arm still mangled, he hadn't had much else to do, so he'd bought a cake. It stopped tasting good after the third slice. He threw it out after the fourth made him feel sick.

"You don't get hurt often either, so it's weird when you do. Feels like a rule in the universe got broken or something." Hanta commented, as he lazily finished up the last of his English worksheet. Katuski could already see he'd gotten two wrong. They could fix it tomorrow.

"Maybe I need to get hurt more often; help you lot get used to it."

"Don't you dare." Eijirou instantly responded, with a surprising amount of venom in his voice. Katsuki raised his hands to mime surrender. The red-haired boy put down his own homework, laying himself very carefully over Katsuki's injured side. He didn't put any weight on it, just shielding him gently with his arms and head resting on Katsuki's upper chest.

There were frustrated tears in his eyes. Katsuki moved his one free hand to dab them away.

"I was only joking Eiji'. You know how much I hate wasting time like this."

The tears didn't fall, and he got a nod in reply, but Eijirou didn't move from his protective position. Katsuki didn't ask him to.

Eventually they all had to head back to the dorms for dinner, but they promised to return tomorrow morning. Mina and Hanta had to basically drag Eijirou with them, and Denki wasn't much better.

Quiet filled the room after they'd finally shuffled out. Katsuki wasn't dumb though. In the shadows of the doorway stood a pale form, green eyes round and pained.

"Get in here, you look like a stalker."

After startling, Izuku followed directions with his head hung. At first he just stepped into the room, but before long he was sitting in the chair by Katsuki's bedside. Quiet overtook the room once again. Katsuki let out a heavy sigh.

"It's two fractured ribs, no internal bleeding, no nothing. I'm fine. Get over it."

"It could've been worse. What if I'd-"

"Nope, not playing that game with you. Yeah, lotta things could've happened, but they didn't. So thinking about them is pointless. I'm fine, I'll be back on my feet and good to go tomorrow. You couldn't have known I was behind that wall. I couldn't have known you were about to bust through it. We're heroes in training, we get hurt sometimes. You of all people should know that."

Those green eyes just shifted downwards, still so guilty. Again, Katsuki sighed before leaning over to grab Izuku's collar. He was still in his hero costume, having not bothered to change since the accident.

"Come on, I'm too damn warm."

Izuku tried to protest, instantly worried about injuring Katsuki further. Despite his flailing, he

didn't fight back, allowing himself to be pulled into the bed.

For a few seconds, it looked like he might move. Like he wanted to argue the point further. Katsuki didn't care, he wiggled until he could comfortably lay his head on Izuku's chest. That ended the argument, and before long, Izuku had shifted to wrap a very careful arm around his shoulder.

His dad came by the next morning. He'd been called right after it happened. Katsuki had snatched the phone to tell him that it was a minor injury and everyone was overreacting. No, he didn't need to leave his patrol to come see him, yes, Katsuki was sure. All he was going to do was sleep it off anyways. Yes, he promised to be careful with it.

Tsunagu didn't comment on the fact Katsuki was snuggled up with his childhood friend, it was one of the many odd things he'd accepted about his son. Instead he focused on checking over the injury himself, just to be safe. Katsuki rolled his eyes but put up with it, and they spent the early morning hours chatting about school and training until Recovery Girl finally came in to heal him.

After that, he had the morning off to recover from the healing. Tsunagu brought him back to the dorms despite his insistence that he was well enough to return to classes. Katsuki ended up napping in the dorm common room against his best efforts to spitefully stay awake. By the time he rejoined the rest of his class for the afternoon Katsuki felt good as new. Aizawa welcomed him back with a nod. Unlike when Izuku returned from being injured he didn't get a 'be more careful' or a 'don't pull that again kid', because unlike Izuku, Katsuki was already careful and usually didn't get himself hurt. He only did what he had to do. So he got a nod instead, and Aizawa keeping a very close eye on him for the next week.

Izuku held back that entire week during training, unwilling to break through anything for fear of someone being on the other side. It took Katsuki baiting him into sparring twice for him to get the message and start giving it his all again. Eijirou stuck by his side like glue when they were on the same team in heroics exercises. When they weren't he still kept close as best he could. Mina and Denki were similar, keeping near him just in case, though luckily they weren't as bad as Eijirou. Hanta gave him his space, which Katsuki was grateful for. The other teenager was good at dragging the rest of the squad elsewhere when Katsuki needed time to chill.

Shouto was the oddest one of all. He kept his distance during training, more than usual. When they were back at the dorms though, that was when he stuck close. Finding any excuse to always be in the same room, even going so far as to ask Katsuki to tutor him on his first evening back in the dorms. On homework Katsuki knew for a fact Shouto completed two days ago. It was weird, but Shouto was weird. So Katsuki had let him in without comment, not bothering to call him out on what they both knew was a lie. Instead he went back to his embroidery which was almost finished now, allowing Shouto to sit next to him on his bed and sort through whatever emotional shit he was dealing with.

Even if they could get annoying, Katsuki had to admit it was nice. Knowing that they cared. It chased away memories of when he was younger, bandaging up his own mangled arm again. Being told to tough it out even though everything hurt so much. Her voice screeching in his ear when all he wanted to do was lick his wounds and cry.

Yeah, he'd take the fretting any day.

***Not Supposed To**

Recommend Listening

Katsuki wasn't supposed to be there.

Usually he did his morning jog around the school. Today he'd felt like mixing it up and running in the city. He did that sometimes, though more rarely now that he was in his second year at UA. There wasn't as much time for it.

That was what Kirishima had told him between hurried breaths, as they'd been racing into the hospital. The poor boy was shaking almost as badly as Tsunagu was.

Katsuki wasn't supposed to get hurt today.

But he had been.

The villain behind the attack had been arrested.

Nobody had died yet.

That was all the comfort Aizawa could offer him, as they sat together in the waiting room. The man's eyes looked hollow. He had already been through so much.

If Katsuki hadn't been there, people would've died. The monstrous robot would've been able to kill hundreds before the pros could've gotten there. The villain had picked the attack site well, no heroes were supposed to be there.

But he had been there. He'd seen it break through the ground, and he'd acted before it could hurt anyone. No one else was even in critical care. The damage from the attack had already been cleaned up. Five blasts from him had taken down the robot's armor and allowed him to blow it to pieces. It was an astounding display of power and strategic thinking.

That was what Kugo had said, having read the reports before he arrived at the hospital. He put one large hand on Tsunagu's back. They were alone, and Tsunagu cried for the first time that day. The feeling of helplessness overtaking him.

Katsuki was there, even though he shouldn't have been. The villain had already been arrested, they'd only managed to get out a single attack before the pros had arrived on the scene. He hadn't been supposed to get hurt today, but he did. One massive blow while Katsuki's back was turned, just as he was landing. The robot had been defeated less than five minutes after it had appeared. Hundreds of lives had been saved, and Katsuki wasn't dead yet.

That was what Tsunagu said, when Hawks finally stumbled into the waiting room. Eyes wide, so young, so scared. He hadn't dealt with losing someone in the field yet, he'd only been doing this four years after all. Tsunagu prayed to any god who'd listen today wouldn't be the day he had to learn how to.

Twenty three years old, the weight of the world on his shoulders, and now one of the children he mentored was facing down death. Hawks had taken to calling Katsuki and Tokoyami his

fledglings. He adored them both, always teasing them and keeping a watchful eye on them during their work-study. For all that Hawks tended to rush anything and everything in his life, he had always been careful with them. Always slowed down for them. Not that it mattered today.

Tsunagu pulled the winged hero into a hug and let him sob. He hadn't been able to speak all day, not until now. Not until there someone who needed him. Something he could do.

His own words finally came, and he said what nobody else had dared say.

Katsuki was strong. The wound was bad, and the doctors may not be sure yet, but he would pull through. No matter what life threw at him, Katsuki would find his way through in the end. He'd made his way through hell already, young, alone and with no guidance. This wouldn't be what stopped him.

Leaning into the hug, he felt Hawks believe him.

Katsuki wasn't supposed to be there, but he was. He wasn't supposed to get hurt today, but he did. If he hadn't been, hundreds would've died.

Katsuki wasn't supposed to survive. Too much blood loss. Too much damage done. Too much time before they got him on the operating table, because they couldn't move him or get an ambulance through. They would do everything they could, but he wasn't supposed to survive the night.

That was what the doctor had said, in a quiet voice. As other doctors were fighting to save Tsunagu's son.

But he would. Tsunagu had said. To Kirishima, and all his classmates who were curled up with one another, children too young to be dealing with this. To Aizawa, who was trying his best to comfort his children, even as he didn't dare let himself have hope. To Kugo, ever the realist, whose eyes had fallen at the doctors words. To Hawks, who was looking to him for guidance, needing something to believe in.

You weren't supposed to say things like that in hero work. You were supposed to be realistic. It didn't always work out. You were supposed to be hopeful, and do your best, but not say things like that because they could be wrong.

Katsuki didn't care much about what he was supposed to do. Never had. Probably never would. Tsunagu didn't care today either.

Today he wasn't a hero. Today he was a father, waiting desperately for the news that his son would live.

Nobody else said anything. There wasn't anything left to say.

The surgery lasted for 34 grueling hours. The longer it went on, the surer Tsunagu became. Katsuki was strong. If anyone could do it, it would be him.

He wasn't dead yet.

34 hours passed them by, and they finally heard the news.

Katsuki wasn't supposed to stabilize, but he did.

The doctors were shocked by his recovery. Even if he had beat the odds and survived, it should've

been several days before his vitals stabilized. Now they were estimating he'd only be on life support for a day or two to be safe. There was even a chance he might walk again.

While the damage had been bad, Katsuki's body had adapted over the years to absorb impacts. His flight patterns alone had conditioned him for it, to say nothing of his larger explosions. Even though his quirk modified his blood somewhat, the blood transfusion had still worked without a hitch.

That was what the nurse had said as he gave them the news, a smile on his face and awe in his eyes. Tsunagu had wept out of overwhelming joy when he heard those words. Even though he'd steadfastly believed Katsuki would make it, there was nothing compared to the sheer relief of hearing it confirmed.

He still didn't want to leave, but he'd taken one look at Hawks who'd been there just as long as he had and known there was someone who needed him more than Katsuki did right now.

Hawks had refused to leave, even Rumi hadn't been able to drag him away. All it took was an outstretched hand from Tsunagu and he went. He'd stayed at Tsunagu's place before. Almost every pro-hero in the area had Hawks drop in on them once or twice. The winged hero constantly worked himself to the point of exhaustion, until he couldn't even manage the flight back to his own apartment. There was a silent agreement among the more experienced pro-heroes to know where he was working and have a window left open or be waiting for a knock at their door.

If he came in through the window, it meant he was too tired to keep going. If he knocked at the door, it meant he just couldn't be alone for the night. Both types of dropping in had gotten less frequent since Katsuki became his intern. The teenager had taken it upon himself to bully Hawks into feeding himself properly and taking breaks. Sometimes Hawks still managed to push his limits, but he'd gotten much better at taking care of himself. Apparently Katsuki had lots of practice with Izuku over the years. Tsunagu found himself growing closer to the winged hero as well. Sometimes Hawks would even come over to visit before he reached his breaking point. Tonight was different though.

Neither of them spoke, but Tsunagu got him some fresh clothes. For once, Hawks didn't complain about how odd they looked on him. Both of them ate, and they both slept for the first time in what felt like weeks.

The next morning they went back to the hospital. Two hours after they arrived, they were finally allowed to see him. No more than four people at a time, but he could have visitors now, the nurse had said.

They went together, Inko and Izuku alongside them.

Katsuki looked so young on the bed, face pale, eyes closed, body relaxed. It reminded Tsunagu too much of how he'd looked all that time ago. Too young to be there. Too young to have survived everything he had.

Yet there he was, once again, against all odds.

Tsunagu took one of Katsuki's hands. He let the others do the talking.

Eventually, Hawks left. He had to get back to his hero work. For once, Tsunagu didn't tell him to slow down or take a break. Hawks needed to throw himself back into doing something good, needed some control. It was understandable. People cycled in and out to see Katsuki. All Tsunagu could do was hold his son's hand and remind himself *Katsuki was still here*. Now the doctor said

she thought he'd make a full recovery. It was too early to say for sure, but his resilience was incredible. Izuku had several theories about his nitroglycerin enhancing his healing rate. As much as he tried to pay attention to the boy's rambling, Tsunagu couldn't find it within himself to care about anything other than the fact that his son was still alive. Still in his reach.

Katsuki wasn't supposed to wake up for a week.

But two days later, only a day after the life support had been removed, he'd had enough of sleeping. He'd missed too much school already. Besides, he didn't want everyone wasting their time worrying over him when it hadn't actually been that bad.

That was what Katsuki said, after his red eyes blinked open. The hand Tsunagu had been holding moved to try to rub away lingering traces of sleep. It took a few moments for both of them to process the motion. Tsunagu leaned in, finally holding his son in his arms again. Finally feeling his son reach up to hug him back.

Katsuki wasn't supposed to do a lot of things, but he did them anyways. For that, Tsunagu was grateful.

***Homesick & Sleepless**

Two months after Katsuki moved in with Tsunagu, it was time for him to move out again. School was starting up and everyone was moving into the dorms.

It was an odd feeling, one Katsuki couldn't quite explain as he finished packing up the last of his stuff. There wasn't too much to pack, between not having much interest in most of life outside of heroics and the risk of his mother burning his things, Katsuki hadn't accumulated many possessions. At most it took him a day or so to get it all packed up and sent off.

He wasn't moving that far, and he'd still see Tsunagu once a week, if not more. They'd already set aside time in the week, Sundays, for him to come home.

The dorm rooms weren't particularly large or small. About the same size as his bedroom. It shouldn't matter that much to him where he was staying. If anything, staying at the dorms would be nice. Save him a ton of travel time, that much was for sure. Being in close proximity with his classmates would probably be a blessing and a curse. Still, the idea of having them close was appealing. Least it'd be harder for them to get themselves hurt when he could be there to glare at them for whatever dumb shit they were about to pull.

Realistically though, he was just moving from one location to another. It shouldn't matter that much to him.

Katsuki had told himself that several times, yet there was still an odd ache in his chest whenever he thought about leaving the apartment. It shouldn't matter. It shouldn't. Why did he still feel like he was forgetting something? Like something important had been left behind?

He didn't understand it, yet the ache was still there as he sat next to Tsunagu on the train, leaning against him and turning his feelings over in his head. It clung to him as he hugged Tsunagu

goodbye, promising with a roll of his eyes that he'd text if he forgot anything, and making a face when his hair was ruffled affectionately.

It was hard to pay attention to Aizawa explaining the dorm rules with the ache pulling him down. He did his best anyways. Some of the rules felt slightly pointed towards him, and he figured he should listen to those at least.

"Nobody will enter your dorm room without your permission, barring an emergency, or reasonable evidence that you have contraband. Teachers may sometimes need to make sure all students are accounted for after hours if there's evidence someone is missing or a villain threat, in which case we'll knock before entering. If you don't respond, we'll have to open your door to get visual confirmation you're okay. Outside of those specific situations, teachers will not be entering dorm rooms or conducting any searches."

Aizawa stopped his lecture for a moment to sweep his gaze over the class, giving him an exasperated yet fond look.

"If you're going to hide stuff, just put it under your bed or in the closet or something. Do not remove floor or ceiling tiles to create hiding places, and please do not booby-trap anything in your room."

Well now, that almost sounded like a challenge. So no floor or ceiling tiles, Katsuki could work with that. Since he'd started staying with Tsunagu, Katsuki had mostly gotten over his impulsive need to stash anything of importance behind multiple layers of security. Now he was able to feel safe with things carefully tucked in the back corner of the closet or camouflaged under his bed. But if he was being issued a challenge, he'd absolutely take it on. All he needed was some wood, drywall and trim. A false back to the closet would almost certainly go unnoticed unless someone was looking for it. At most it'd take him a week.

They were free to leave after that lecture. The rest of the class was hosting some kind of room decorating contest. Katsuki steadfastly refused to take part, he thought it was silly and he didn't want the rest of the class poking their noses into his room. Denki and Mina attempted to protest, but Eijirou thankfully talked over them, redirecting their energy towards getting their own rooms set up. After flashing his friend a grateful smile, Katsuki retreated to unpack his stuff.

It didn't take him long, and before he knew it he was left on his freshly made bed. For a little while, he lay listening to the sounds of his classmates messing around. That ache pulled at his chest, and he couldn't seem to relieve it no matter how he moved. Pushing himself to his feet, Katsuki decided to go see what his classmates were up to. Even if he wasn't letting them look at his room, there was no reason he couldn't critique their poor taste. The ache never quite went away, but it was easier to ignore when he was surrounded by his idiots, teasing them and being teased back.

When night fell, the ache returned with a vengeance. While Katsuki still frequently got nightmares, lessened over summer but present all the same, he didn't usually have trouble falling asleep. He'd learned how to force himself into it even under uncomfortable conditions; it was a survival skill for him. Yet somehow, no matter what he tried, he couldn't get his mind to turn off.

Something felt wrong. The universe was off-kilter and Katsuki couldn't understand what it was.

The walls are wrong. The bed isn't right. The city noises are gone. Everything is in the wrong place. The windows shouldn't be that large.

It was the tiniest voice, more a feeling than anything else. Despite how small it was, it pulled the

rest of him into a state of tense alarm.

Hours passed him by as Katsuki tossed and turned in his bed, unable to get comfortable. Why was this happening now? He'd never had issues with sleeping in new places before. Or at least, he'd never had issues with falling asleep in new places before. It couldn't be the kidnapping, he'd fallen asleep in the apartment after that.

Finally, he gave up. Maybe taking a walk would clear his head. Katsuki shuffled out of his room and downstairs to the dorm kitchen. When he got there, he set about making tea. One of the things he'd brought with him was an oddly spicy blend he loved. Before trying it he'd never particularly liked tea, but it'd quickly become a part of his morning routine since he'd moved in with Tsunagu. Even just the smell of the tea bag reminded him of quiet, peaceful mornings. Once the tea was poured he took a deep whiff of the aroma, eyes sliding shut, allowing himself to pretend for a heartbeat he was back at the apartment. Back home. The ache in his chest eased the slightest bit, maybe there was still hope for sleep tonight. After blowing on it for a bit, Katsuki leaned down to take a sip of his tea, eyes closed as the tension eased from his body.

"You couldn't sleep either?"

Only years of careful training and Izuku's annoying habit of popping up fucking everywhere kept Katsuki from startling at the smooth voice behind him. He turned to glare at one of the very few people who could sneak up on him. Heterochromic eyes stared back at him, completely unfazed, the asshole. Several long seconds ticked by before Katsuki sighed and dropped the glare. Talking about this sorta shit might help. That was what he'd been reading in his books anyways.

"Nah, I dunno how to explain it, but I've been feeling off since I left the apartment. There's been a weird ache in my chest and now I can't fall asleep because everything feels... wrong. The tea's helping though. What about you?"

"I often have trouble falling asleep at night. Insomnia runs in my family."

Katsuki nodded in understanding, and a comfortable silence fell between them. A minute passed and Shouto moved to make tea of his own. Time slipped by as they both sipped their drinks, it couldn't last forever though. When his cup was empty, Katsuki washed out his mug, setting it to dry on the rack by the sink. Shouto finished not long after, leaving the silence between them now more of a question than anything else.

Alright, fuck this. It wasn't like either of them were getting to sleep tonight. The thought of heading back to his empty room to keep tossing and turning wasn't particularly appealing either.

"You wanna come back to my room? I'm not going to sleep like this anyways, might as well have some company in my misery."

After a pause to consider, Shouto nodded hesitantly. Looking to Katsuki to lead the way.

So lead the way he did, back up to his room, to the bed he'd spent the night turning helplessly in. They sat together, Katsuki working on his knitting and Shouto watching him work. Having someone else there eased the ache further, made him feel a bit safer. Despite his earlier proclamation, Katsuki found his eyes starting to droop. The project was tucked to the side, and instead he took to quietly talking with Shouto.

Nothing they said was important, little details traded about things they'd grown up with. Things that didn't mean much to others, but meant too much to them.

Somehow, they ended up falling asleep together. When Katsuki awoke, he had to untangle himself from the other teenage to get up on time. Shouto protested with grumbles and a tightened grip, the bastard was clingy when he was tired, but Katsuki managed to free himself eventually. It was a little later than he normally woke up, 6 AM instead of 5 AM, but that was still enough time for a quick work out.

Hm. Probably fine to leave Shouto in here. He wasn't going to fuck with Katsuki's stuff. Besides, he could use the extra sleep.

It wasn't until the next night that Katsuki realized the ache was almost entirely gone. The room didn't exactly feel right, but it didn't feel as wrong anymore. By the fourth night in the dorms, he found himself falling asleep as if nothing had been amiss in the first place.

Sometimes though, when he was sleepless, he found himself wandering down to the dorm kitchen. More often than not, if he waited with his tea, he was joined by a familiar face. As they grew closer, Katsuki found himself awoken by a knock on his door every so often. He never asked any questions. Never pointed out the red around Shouto's eyes on those nights. Never asked about the haunted look in those mismatched eyes.

If Shouto wanted to tell him, he would. More often than not he would explain himself as soon as they had moved to Katsuki's bed. Those nights that he didn't, instead curling himself tightly into Katsuki, well, Katsuki wasn't going to push him to talk. He was entitled to his secrets.

Katsuki always moved his alarm on those nights, pushing off his morning workout by an hour or so. He could always catch up in the afternoon. Besides, it was nice to have someone else beside him. Chasing away the last traces of that ache, replaced by steady breathing and a sense of being home again. That was worth an hour of sleeping in.

*Habit

Recommended Listening

Katsuki was a creature of habit. Growing up with so much instability in his life, he'd learned to take control of whatever he could. It was the little things that kept him sane, kept some part of him free of her. Every step he could take to keep control of himself, he did. He went to bed at 9 pm, he woke up at 5 am. His meals were planned out at least a week in advance. Outstanding circumstances aside, he had stuck to his training schedule near perfectly for the past 10 years. If his hands felt even slightly damp, he made sure to spark them off.

One of his more enjoyable habits was his artwork. Every other day he took out his sketchbook and recorded a few memories in pencil. Anything he wanted to remember later, good or bad. Then it was tucked away again, safe and away from her. He took it with him when he went to the woods. Sometimes he brought it on vacation with him, if he thought he could sneak away from her long enough to draw.

The level of detail for each piece varied, as did the number of pieces on any given day, and the subjects. There was only one absolute rule; Katsuki did not draw around other people.

Before he had been obsessively careful to avoid her finding out that he'd kept up the habit. All his supplies were carefully hidden, he didn't doodle in notebooks or margins, and he only ever drew when neither of his parents were home.

For the first while, he'd kept to that rule. If Tsunagu was home then his sketchbook stayed safely tucked away.

Slowly though, that rule started to seem unnecessary. Katsuki was still uncomfortable with the idea of anyone else knowing about his artwork, but he wanted to change that.

At first it was just sketching closer to the times when Tsunagu would come home. He had to calm his racing heart several times when he heard the door open while his sketchbook was still in his hands (Fire roaring, destroying months of his hard work. Taking all the memories away from him. All for a reason he couldn't recall. Can't let it burn again, can't, can't, cant-). As time passed with nothing bad happening, it stopped being utterly terrifying.

The next step was working on the pieces when Tsunagu was home. That was harder. It took him several days to work up the courage, but he finally managed to pull his sketchbook out and draw for a minute or two before bed, while Tsunagu was in his own bedroom with little chance of leaving.

He couldn't touch his sketchbook for three days after that. When he did though, Tsunagu was home again. This time he drew for five minutes before tucking it away.

Five minutes turned into ten. Right before bed turned into more dangerous times, like when Tsunagu was just busy doing something else. Ten minutes into fifteen. He stopped triple checking that the bedroom door was locked (Tsunagu always knocked anyways, so it didn't really matter, right?). Fifteen minutes into twenty. Really he didn't need to lock the door at all. Twenty into twenty five. For the first time since she'd burned the first one, Katsuki left his sketchbook on his nightstand before ducking out of the room. Twenty five into thirty. Sometimes he left the box on the nightstand or on his bed. Thirty into thirty five. He'd only managed to leave it unlocked once, but it was progress.

One Tuesday evening, he brought his sketchbook out to help Tsunagu make dinner without thinking. He'd been finishing up a scene with Eijirou and Izuku that had happened the day before, and there were still a few details he wanted to add. So he tucked it under his arm, his pencil into his pocket and didn't even think of the implications until he had set it down on the counter to chop vegetables.

Panic tried to set in when he realized how exposed it was, but Katsuki fought it down. Tsunagu noticed the sketchbook, of course he did, it'd be stupid of him to not.

It didn't escape Katsuki how Tsunagu didn't go near the counter where he'd left the sketchbook. He was careful not to step between Katsuki and the precious book, not even getting close to it.

After dinner, Katsuki kept the sketchbook out, and for the very first time since he was a little kid, he drew with someone else in the room. It wasn't much, just adding those finishing details on the piece. Then the sketchbook went straight back into the box, locked up tight, and tucked in the back of his closet.

Thursday he pulled it out after dinner, determined to keep up his progress. That evening he sketched on the couch for a full ten minutes. The scene he drew was shaky and sloppy. He liked it anyways.

One day he'd feel brave enough to show Tsunagu some of the drawings. Sillier ones at first, more detailed pieces next. The ones from the darker parts of his childhood last. One day in their second year, Katsuki would sketch in the dorm common room without caring about Eijirou peeking over his shoulder or Denki trying to paw through his sketchbook when he wasn't looking.

Today Katsuki could only manage 10 minutes, but looking back at where he'd come from, he couldn't help but be proud of how far he'd come.

Katsuki was still a creature of habit, but he was not bound by them. Even if they were just little things. Katsuki could, and he would change them, step by step. Because she didn't control him. They were his habits, his to live by or leave behind. When they didn't suit him anymore, well then, he could always make better ones.

*Coworkers

Hisako had seen a lot in her life.

Having worked as the head manager for several pro-hero agencies, it was impossible for her to not have. She knew more secrets than most people could dream of. If she ever felt so inclined, she could probably trigger the collapse of society. Obviously though, she had no desire to do that. She was quite content with her job. Prior to accepting Tsunagu's offer to run his hero agency, she had worked with several other overbearing and idiotic heroes. Sexism ran deep in the hero industry, and men often had issues with a female manager telling them what to do, even when it was what they had hired her for. What drew her to Tsunagu was how respectful he was upon meeting her. His eyes never wandered anywhere inappropriate, not once did he try to tell her what to do, and he never attempted any contact outside of a polite handshake. It was why she accepted his offer, even though starting a new agency was risky. She trusted him to know what he was doing and see it through. She made the right call that day.

All these years later, she could safely say they'd been through almost everything together. Weathered every storm of public approval, the loss of sidekicks in the line of duty, office politics, regular politics, revenge plots, attacks on the office, all of it they endured and came out stronger. By this point, she had been sure nothing could surprise her.

Tsunagu always found a way. He was stubborn like that.

When he first sent her a memo about wanting to offer an internship to the winner of the UA Sports Festival, she'd been wary. She too had been caught up in the narrative around Katsuki Bakugou, as ashamed as she was to admit it. The boy was violent as far as she had known. Not only that, but she'd been concerned about smaller issues too. The quirk match up wasn't exactly great, Tsunagu quirk worked very differently and it might be hard for him to offer advice. Their personalities might not mesh well. Tsunagu was known for going a bit too far, not being able to give up on a lost cause, pushing others a bit too hard like he pushed himself, and it worried her. Pushing a ticking time bomb could have disastrous consequences. Despite all her concerns, she had gone ahead and sent the offer anyway. Even though it was risky, just like all those years ago, she decided to trust Tsunagu.

Again, she was glad she did.

During his internship, she only met Katsuki twice. Brief visits both times. She recalled being struck by how much he reminded her of Tsunagu, even while being so fundamentally different from him at the same time. Just like Tsunagu, he was all in on everything. They both had the same intensity to them. Just like Tsunagu, he pushed too much; himself and others alike. More surprisingly though, just like Tsunagu, he treated her with respect.

Not in the same way Tsunagu had of course. Tsunagu was all polite words, kind tone, and honorifics. Katsuki was different, his tone was rough, his words were barely suitable to be said in public and he hardly used people's names, let alone honorifics. Still, he was respectful. Not once did he talk down to her like so many other hotshot interns tried to. While he stated his opinions bluntly, none of them were unfairly targeted. Unkind, maybe, but not dishonest. He looked her in the eye when he spoke, he listened to what she said without interrupting, and he never attempted to order her around.

From what she saw on the cameras and what she heard around the office, she wasn't the only one with this experience. While Katsuki was blunt, rough and angry, he was still respectful. His way of showing it was simply different. There was something off about him though. Tsunagu had picked up on it too, and expressed his concern to her both during the internship and after it.

It was why, when she heard the boy had been taken by villains, far earlier than the general public or even Tsunagu had, she got Tsunagu's name on the list for the rescue mission without him needing to ask. She almost regretted her choice as she sat days later, waiting for a phone call from the hospital to know if he would make it or not. Tsunagu was her friend, and although she never let that hold her back, never let that stop her from sending him into danger when he needed to go, she hated knowing how easy it would've been for him to die that day. While Hisako had accepted she might lose him one day, she couldn't say it would be an easy day for her or that she wouldn't do everything in her power to stop that day from coming.

After all was said and done though, after she'd gotten the report that Tsunagu was going to make it and would be released from the hospital that evening. Later that night when she'd been woken up by a string of texts from Kugo letting her know Tsunagu had taken the boy into protective custody; that was when she knew she'd made the right call.

Morning had come, and she'd called Karen into her office, along with several other members of the PR team. They'd put together a plan for dealing with the adoption publicity going forward before she'd sent them off to their tasks while she waited for Tsunagu to come around to the same conclusions she did.

Took him a day to catch up. That was why she was in charge of the agency though, always one step ahead. Always knowing him better than he knew himself. It was her job.

Prior to all of this, she had never been sure if Tsunagu would have kids of his own. He'd always wanted them. Even at their very first meeting, at a coffee shop in downtown Tokyo, she'd watched his eyes linger fondly on a toddler babbling happily at another table. Children were hard for heroes, harder still for single ones. While he'd resigned himself to a life without a kid, she'd never been quite so certain of its impossibility. It was down to fate more than anything else.

Still, for all the thought she'd put into whether or not he would have children, she had never quite envisioned how a child would change him. Let alone a child like Katsuki.

There were nice things about it. Tsunagu had always pushed himself too hard. All the hero sorts did. It was a joke among agency managers; half their job was getting heroes to do their work, the

other half of it was getting them to stop. Once he got Katsuki, well, it didn't stop him from always giving his all, but it did make her life far easier. He actually went home on time without reminders more often than not. Nights when he had a particularly difficult or risky case he'd stay, but he got better about putting his less urgent work to the side. In battles, he was ever so slightly more careful. Never running from a fight, oh god no, she'd never manage to get him to do that, but his injury rate went down. More often she found him using defensive maneuvers, allowing a little bit of property damage so that nobody (himself now included), got hurt. Her blood pressure was thankful for it.

Like any new parent, he talked about Katsuki constantly. That could get a little annoying, but in a fond sort of way. Those green eyes of his always lit up as he talked about whatever mundane thing he and his son had done together. He was the sort to take photos too, because of course he was. During the summer not a day went by that she didn't get a photo of Katsuki and Tsunagu together. It was nice to see him so happy.

There was the new parent nerves as well. Luckily, Kugo appeared to have become the designated person he worried to, but it didn't mean that she didn't do her share of listening to him overthink every plan or pace around as he tried to decide if he was reading too much into something (the answer was almost always yes).

The scarf had been a fun surprise, and of course it caused a media storm she had to deal with, but she'd managed to spin it and in the process brought scarves into fashion during the heat of summer, because she was damn good at her job. That didn't mean she wasn't grateful when the ugly green and blue scarf was swapped out for a lovely blue one in October. Katsuki thankfully had taste, even if Tsunagu had developed a blind spot in his.

The most unexpected changes had been the little ones. Beyond the scarf, Tsunagu casual wardrobe had... shifted. Not a lot. Nothing drastic. He wore darker colors more often though. More bright colors on a black background. Little things had started popping up around the office that seemed out of place. Black decorations with skulls scattered randomly. Cacti replacing dead hanging plants. Not anything big, not anything that would shock someone who didn't know what to look for. Just odd things that felt slightly out of place.

After asking Tsunagu about the rather morbid painting, a battle scene, that he had chosen to replace one that had gotten destroyed in his office, she'd found her answer. It had reminded him of Katsuki. Of course it did.

At some point, an embroidered canvas was hung on the wall behind his desk.

'This is proof that I have the patience to stab something over 1,000 times.' It read, in a very pretty font, surrounded by simple flowers and grass.

She didn't need to ask to know Katsuki had made it. Of all the new decorations, it was her personal favorite.

None of this quite prepared her for when she met the boy himself again. Nothing ever could have.

Hisako had seen a lot in her life, she'd seen near miraculous reformations, but never anything quite as impressive as this.

Four months after Tsunagu took Katsuki into his custody, she met Katsuki Hakamata for the first time. He was an entirely new person and the exact same boy she had met during his internship.

What struck her most was that he smiled. Before she had never seen that frown leave his face, not

even when he was walking the hallways alone. He'd worn his bad mood like a coat in the dead of winter. When she met him this time, sitting on Tsunagu's office couch, working on some homework while he waited for the hero to return, he gave her a polite smile when he looked up. His shoulders were loose now, free of that tension. No longer looking like they would snap should another burden be placed on them.

Hisako had only meant to drop some paperwork off, but she found herself caught up in a conversation with Katsuki instead. Now his voice was quieter, still as firm and powerful as ever, but he didn't yell. Tsunagu had mentioned hearing aids, and she had to wonder if that was what caused the difference, or if he just no longer felt he had to yell in order to be heard. While his speech patterns were still rough, it was less like sandpaper and more like a rock face.

Before long she had to get back to her work, she was a very busy woman after all, but it was shocking to see how far the boy had come. Really though, Tsunagu always managed to find new ways to surprise her even after all these years, she supposed it made sense his son would follow in his footsteps.

***Costume**

It wasn't a big change. Most people didn't notice.

Katsuki switched the cargo pants in his hero costume for a similar pair of black jeans. They were still loose, the same color, just a slightly different texture. A different material. The support company didn't ask any questions, they just modified the new pants to fit the belt and coated them in the same flame retardant substances as the prior pairs. The old pairs were tucked at the back of his dresser in case he needed them, and that was that. He was pretty sure Izuku noticed, of course he would. Eijirou could tell something was different with the texture. Neither of them said anything though. The former because he already knew why Katsuki had made the switch and the later because he didn't see a reason to ask.

Tsunagu noticed the change, it'd be hard for him not to. He'd told Katsuki once before that he instinctively felt the fiber types around him, knowing which were present was vital for using his quirk. So he noticed, but he didn't say anything either. The change did make him relax a little more though. Knowing that if worse came to worst, he would be able to save Katsuki from a fight that much faster.

It wasn't a big change. Almost nobody noticed it. The people who did notice it didn't say anything, but sometimes it wasn't about what was said. Sometimes the little changes spoke volumes all on their own.

***Camping**

Towards the end of the summer, Tsunagu noticed Katsuki's eyes drifting towards the window more and more often. Fixed on the distant skyline where city gave way to green. He spent more time out walking in the local parks. When they walked together, he steered them towards the few parks with little forests, lingering among the trees. Katsuki didn't say anything. It was easy for Tsunagu to guess why. The way he'd jerk out of a calm headspace, glancing to his hands. To his wrists. How he would rub at the back of his neck every so often when they walked, his pace always picking up after, feet guiding them away from the trees. Yet for all that the forest put him on edge, it always pulled him back.

Stories from the court case slipped to the forefront of Tsunagu's mind. A childhood spent sheltering in the safety of bark and leaves was not so easily forgotten.

He had already been planning to take a bit of time off to spend with Katsuki before the move to the dorms. A camping trip before the chaos of school sounded lovely. After double checking the weather and his days off, he approached Katsuki with the idea.

"... Are you sure it's safe?"

Tsunagu could hear the hesitation, the fear, how quietly Katsuki asked the question, yet there was hope there too. The way Katsuki's posture had perked up, how even though his voice was quiet it wasn't timid. How red eyes were looking towards Tsunagu instead of away from him, trusting him to know the answer instead of trying to over analyze the risks. He answered carefully.

"I've spoken with Aizawa, Kugo, and Naomosa about the possibility; current reports indicate the League of Villains are still heavily focused on recuperating. My quirk should be able to counter almost any of their current members, and as only you and I would know where we were going, the risk of them showing up is very low. So yes, I believe it would be safe."

Katsuki's eyes fell, staring off into space in consideration. Several beats passed in silence.

"We don't have to if it would make you uncomfortable, I'd be more than happy to stay in more populated areas."

"No, I-." Katsuki paused again, hands twitched, palms sparking off in the way Tsunagu had come to learn meant he was nervous. "I want to go. I've been missing the forests, I mean, I probably spent more time in them than I did my house. It's just..." Several more seconds of silence. This was difficult for Katsuki, but Tsunagu had learned to wait. Sometimes he needed time to know what he wanted to say. Eventually his face hardened, eyes narrowing, mind made up. With a deep breath, the blonde started again. "I want to go. I'm nervous about it because last time I was out there I got kidnapped, but I want to push past that. I'm pretty sure I'll feel better once I'm out there and in more familiar spaces. Besides... I trust you to keep me safe if something does go wrong."

The last part was said quietly, head ducking even as Katsuki held his determined look. Tsunagu couldn't help but feel a surge of awe at how far Katsuki had come since the start of summer. Carefully he reached out, holding his hand an inch above Katsuki's shoulder, asking silently for permission. After a beat, the teenager granted it by leaning into the touch and Tsunagu pulled him into a hug.

"Thank you for trusting me." He wasn't sure about the next part, wasn't sure if it was his place to say yet or at all, but he wanted to say it anyways. "I'm proud of you, Katsuki. You've come such a long way in so short a time." Katsuki ducked his head lower, face lightly pink in embarrassment. For once, he didn't protest the praise. Instead he accepted it with a hesitant nod.

Smiling at him warmly, Tsunagu shifted his focus to retrieve a map of the nearest forest, the one

Katsuki had told so many childhood stories of.

“Why don’t you show me some of your favorite spots? We can plan our route around them.”

That got Katsuki’s attention, eyes lighting up and hands already reaching out as he started talking about some of his childhood haunts. Tsunagu had to remind himself to listen to what was being said, instead of focusing on the childlike joy hiding in Katsuki’s face.

Yeah. This was a good idea.

They spent three days out in the woods together. It wasn’t deep woodland, they weren’t in the middle of no-where. But it was quite the adventure to see these old forests through fresh eyes. Katsuki was a bit nervous at first, but his fear melted away at the first shrine they stopped at. After the first shrine there was a new bounce in Katsuki’s step. He smiled more than Tsunagu had ever seen before, eyes bright and posture relaxed. Every nook and cranny of the forest had been his to explore when he was younger, his to train in, his to grow in and his to be safe in.

What really struck Tsunagu about the trip was how much Katsuki talked. For as loud as Katsuki’s presence was, he wasn’t one to talk without purpose. Opinions would be offered when he felt them important or when they were asked for. Directions were given without room for hesitation.

Questions were asked in a straightforward manner when he needed to know something. Still, he wasn’t one for volunteering information about himself or telling stories. Here it was different. Here, each tree seemed to have a story behind it which he was eager to share. Each shrine had a thousand starlight nights spent sheltering within it, or odd offerings he had left in his younger years. They passed the cave where he had learned to fly, and Katsuki’s gaze was fond as he ducked into for just a moment. Now it hardly took him a minute to scale down the rock face that had seemed so impossible when he was younger. Only two to get back up safely.

On that trip, Tsunagu learned more about Katsuki than he ever thought he might. Even the court case couldn’t quite compare. While the court case had been focused on the bigger things, significant moments in Katsuki’s life, this was different. This was all the little stories that wouldn’t mean much to anyone else. Stories any child might have, of long days spent making rough maps, of trees that seemed impossibly tall, of quirk mishaps, and little carvings left behind on rocks to mark the way. Tsunagu listened to all of them as they walked through the memories. He hadn’t gotten to be there for much of Katsuki’s childhood, but in a way, he got to experience it through the stories Katsuki told. In return, he told stories of his younger years. When he had been a kid, a teenager, a young pro-hero. Mistakes made, people he’d met, places he’d grown to love. Katsuki listened to all of them in return, laughing freely, sometimes recalling a similar story of his own.

It wasn’t until they crested the last hill, a light wind blowing, their pace slow as they were in no hurry to finish their journey, that Tsunagu realized there had been one constant throughout all of Katsuki’s stories. In each and every one of them, Katsuki had been alone. Every tree had been climbed without someone there to catch him, each shrine slept at without another by his side, and every carving had been made by his knife and his alone.

“...Did you ever hike with the other children you grew up with?”

Shoulders hunched inwards, eyes falling to look at the ground, hands moving to hold onto the straps of his backpack. His voice was even when he spoke, but it wasn’t quite as carefree as it had been mere minutes earlier.

“Nah.” Katsuki’s head tilted downwards. “We’d play at the parks and stuff, but all of them always had to go home. ‘Zuku followed me out here a few times, but it wasn’t really hiking together and he always had to go before I did.”

A sigh, eyes slightly distant, then his lips curled up into a sad sort of smile. “You know, I used to think I was lucky. They weren’t allowed to spend a week messing around in the woods. Nobody else was.”

Shrugging, he considered his words.

“I mean, I guess I was, in a way. It made me who I am. Growing up out here taught me a lot of life skills, means now I’m pretty damn good at keeping myself alive. I wouldn’t change it. But sometimes, when I was out here all alone, I’d wonder what it’d be like to have someone worried about when I was coming home. I told myself I didn’t care, that I didn’t want anyone fussing over me or telling me what to do. Still felt a weird jealousy when someone said they had to head home or their parents would worry.”

Then his posture relaxed a bit, eyes refocused on the present before flickering to look up at Tsunagu before looking back at the ground.

“Guess I don’t have to wonder about that anymore though, huh?”

Tsunagu couldn’t help himself, he leaned over to ruffle Katsuki’s hair lightly getting a fond glare in return.

“No, no you don’t.”

***Rational (Spiteful)**

*Warning for suicide mention/suicidal thoughts/idealization. No actual attempt or self-harm though.

Recommended Listening

Katsuki considered himself a rational human being most of the time. Particularly in combat situations, he prided himself on not letting his emotions get the better of him. He was good at turning them off. Lots of practice when he was a kid meant he could go blank and find the best path forward when pressed to. Fear didn’t consume him, he consumed it.

Sometimes people got hurt in heroics. That was something that came with the job. It wasn’t pleasant, but Katsuki had always understood his dad might get hurt in the line of duty. He had already made peace with that, just as he’d made peace with the same for himself or any of his classmates. Tsunagu didn’t get hurt often, unlike many other heroes his quirk put a stop to the fight before it could start, but it was always a possibility. Katsuki understood that as a rational human being.

Today, Katsuki was not a rational human being.

Today, Katsuki was a kid who saw his dad shot in front of him.

It was Sunday, and they were spending the day together. Nothing particularly special was going on, it had been calm and enjoyable. A nice break from the chaos of the dorms. They’d been walking through the city, on their way back to the apartment, when they’d paused to look at a new store that’d only just opened up.

There was no warning, no shout or reflection in the glass. Katsuki felt something wrong in his bones, and Tsunagu must've felt it too because they were both moving but it was too late.

Katsuki had instinctively launched an explosion, knocking them both back. Tsunagu's threads had shot from one wrist towards the shooter to restrain them, his other hand having gone to push Katsuki down and out of the way.

The bullets flew over Katsuki's head as he hit the ground.

They did not fly over Tsunagu.

One hit him in the stomach, the other in the leg. He'd been knocked upwards by Katsuki's blast and that might've been the only thing that saved him.

When Katsuki's fingers touched the ground, he twisted like a cat to use the momentum, vision going red as explosions sparked in his palm. Without thinking he hurtled himself towards the shooter. The asshole had a transformation type quirk, able to change his fingertips to a gun like shape. He'd already been halfway restrained by Tsunagu's threads, but was struggling to free himself with fingers that had shifted to knives.

Katsuki smashed those hands into the pavement, moving at full force. The pavement broke. Those hands broke too. Finger bones and wrist completely shattered as he'd learn later. The man screamed. Katsuki slammed his head into the pavement and he stopped.

He wasn't dead. Even in his anger, Katsuki wouldn't kill, but he was out cold. Even so, Katsuki took the now loose threads and bound what was left of his hands, tying that quickly to a nearby street post.

Then he was turning around and racing back towards the man on the ground, heart beating out of his chest, fear having overtaken any common sense he had left. Someone was calling for an ambulance already, thank god, he didn't think he could use his phone in this state. Within moments, he was clutching his dad's head, moving his scarf to feel for a pulse. It was weak, but it was there. Words came rushing from his mouth.

"Dad? Fuck, please, just hold on. There's- I think- Yeah. Help's coming. I just need you to hold on for a bit. Okay dad?"

There were tears dripping down his face. Katsuki hadn't realized he was crying until they splashed down onto Tsunagu's coat. Fumbling for his backpack, Katsuki yanked out the first aid kit he carried around with him. Gauze pads were torn from their packaging and pressed into the wounds as carefully as he could, ripping the fabric away to get to the bleeding. Neither was bleeding too badly, but any blood loss right now was bad. Blood loss in general was bad. Unless you were giving blood. Or bleeding a wound to clean it. Or maybe had a quirk that required blood loss.

Alright, that train of thought was unhelpful as fuck so Katsuki was hopping off at the station and getting on the 'shit that will help my dad not fucking die' train instead.

That train appeared to be running late, because Katsuki was drawing a blank as he desperately pressed more gauze into the wounds. He should be doing something about applying pressure. Or, not applying pressure. Or maybe both? Could you do both?

Green eyes blinked open and then Tsunagu was trying to surge upwards. Thank god Katsuki reacted in time, pressing him back down. He was still mumbling out words.

"No, no, no. It's fine, stay down. Please stay down. Please dad, can't make them any worse."

Dunno how bad they are already.”

Tsunagu seemed to listen, though he was tense. After a moment of struggling for air, he managed a single word.

“Shooter?”

“Got ‘em already, I promise. Can’t hurt anyone else now. Don’t worry about them, just stay laying down. Fuck, where is the ambulance?”

Despite his reassurances, his dad was still tense. Several long moments ticked by as he struggled to speak again.

“Wha’ ‘bout you?”

It took a heartbeat for Katsuki to process the question. Shot and bleeding and his dad was still worried about Katsuki who was obviously well enough to be sitting up and talking.

“I’m fine dad, I promise. Didn’t even graze me. I just need you to be okay too. Not much longer now, just hold on, okay?”

His dad’s nod was pained, but he relaxed a little at Katsuki’s reassurances. The ambulance finally got there not long after, and then paramedics swooped in. Someone was holding Katsuki’s shoulders, steering him away. There were police officers there too at some point, but all Katsuki could do was gesture to limp figure on the other side of the street. They got the hint.

It wasn’t long before he was in the ambulance. No sooner was he getting in than he was getting out, walked into a room.

He had bruises on him. Someone cleaned them up and bandaged them. Someone else put a blanket on him and told him he was in shock.

Katsuki couldn’t respond to any of it. Couldn’t process any of it.

It wasn’t until Aizawa got there that he finally found himself able to move.

“Kid...” He’d heard from the doorway, his eyes looked up to see his teacher standing there, pity in his eyes. Then Katsuki was flinging himself forward into his teachers arms and breaking down into sobs.

Holding him tightly, his teacher rubbed his back and let Katsuki cry.

“They think he’ll make it.”

Clinging tighter, Katsuki’s sobbing kept up, but in relief this time. Getting out all the emotions that had overwhelmed him. Aizawa waited patiently for him to calm down enough to keep going.

“You did good kid, no vital organs were hit. He’s got some internal bleeding, but they’re working on stitching that up now.”

“Why?” It was the only word he could get out. Desperate to know.

Why Tsunagu? Best Jeanist didn’t have many enemies. There were villains he fought regularly, nemeses maybe, but most of the criminals in his territory respected Tsunagu even while fighting him. All for One himself had praised his dedication and heroic nature for fuck’s sake. It helped that Tsunagu’s quirk allowed him to be an almost entirely non-violent hero. He’d never accidentally

killed an opponent, and serious injuries were rare. Most criminals got more annoyed with him than anything else, with how he good naturedly swooped in to catch them and hauled them off to jail. It helped that he was always polite to all but the worst of the worst. What could drive someone to hate him so much they'd attack him while he was off-duty? While his back was turned? Without so much as a fighting chance?

"The shooter's still out, so we don't know his motives for sure."

Oh.

Aizawa's voice had a hesitant edge to it. He was trying to decide whether or not to lie to Katsuki.

There was only one reason he would consider lying.

Katsuki pulled back from the hug as if he'd been burned, eyes wide and fixed on his teacher in horror, even as Aizawa tried to reach for him. Regret contorting his face.

His mind was back in that moment, determining exactly how high Tsunagu would've been knocked by his blast. Tracing the path of the bullets. Most of them had hit the wall. The shooter had fired 10 shots total. Even if Tsunagu had been lower down, the shots weren't aimed high enough to hit his heart or head. They could've taken out his lungs at best. Instead they were at just the right height for-

"He was aiming for me."

"We don't know anything for sure." Coming from his teacher, that was practically a confirmation.

Katsuki's eyes narrowed, his balled fists making sparks as fear, anger and hurt broke him down.

"What did they find?"

For several long moments there was silence from his teacher, the sparks in his hands grew until he demanded an answer yet again.

"What did they find!?"

"His phone was unlocked. Police searched it to check for any coordinated attacks or other involvement. They found out he was a follower of Stain, and... he had an obsessive amount of information about you. Lots of bookmarked conspiracy theories, frankly insane stuff. It wasn't your fault kid, the guy was completely nuts."

Again his teacher reached for him. This time Katsuki didn't pull away. The fire had left him. It didn't matter what Aizawa said, it was his fault. His dad was in surgery right now, and it was his fault.

After that, time blurred by him. He could recall telling Aizawa he didn't want to see his classmates, he couldn't handle them, but that was it.

At some point, Kugo had come to sit with him. Vividly he remembered the larger man pulling into a hug, keeping his voice low as he spoke.

"It wasn't your fault kid, wasn't a damn thing you could've done different. Tsunagu, he's tough. He'll be alright."

It was your fault. If you hadn't been selfish. If you hadn't been there, he'd be just fine right now.

That awful voice that sounded like Her in the back of his mind hadn't ever gone away, but for awhile it had been quieter. Easier to ignore. Now it was loud and clear. Not screaming though, she didn't scream when she was right.

Should've been stronger. Should've been faster. Should've put yourself in the way of the bullets. Shouldn't have pushed your way into someone else's life.

No, she didn't scream. Instead she spoke in that low tone, face twisted into a satisfied snarl. He hated it more than anything because she only used it when she knew she'd won. This was his fault, no matter what adults said to try and make him feel better.

Selfish. Dangerous. Hurt other people just by being near them.

How many times had she told him that? Maybe if he'd listened. Maybe if he'd stayed at the hospital instead of being selfish. Maybe. Maybe. Maybe.

Ought to go play in traffic brat. Ought to go stick yourself in an oven. Ought to go hang yourself off one of those trees you love so much.

Sometimes, it was just something she said. Casually, whenever she was mildly annoyed with him. She didn't really mean it those times, so it hurt less. When she was really angry though, that was when she meant it. That was when she got careful with her descriptions. Telling exactly how he should go kill himself. Always making it sound so easy.

For the longest time he'd refused to even think about going through with it. It'd be letting her win. He never let his mind wander down that path, refused to even consider it an option.

It was probably only his hatred of her, his unwillingness to let her have the last word which had kept him alive.

Spite wasn't healthy, it wasn't good for you in the long run, it led to too much hatred. Some people didn't get healthy options though. Sometimes all you got was enough to keep you alive.

Spite had kept Katsuki alive for most of his life. When all else failed him, when he didn't have logic, fear, kindness, bravery, if nothing else, *he had spite*.

As he sat in the waiting room, held carefully in Kugo's arms, unable to process the world around him, he clung onto spite with everything he had. Even as her voice pounded in his skull. Even as they heard there had been a complication in the surgery. Even as he was left alone for a minute or two, and his mind shifted to the knife weighing heavily in his pocket. Katsuki held onto his spite because if he lost that he would lose everything.

No matter what happened tonight, he was not going to let her win. He wasn't going to let the man who'd shot his dad win. That man had wanted him dead, had thought that such a worthy goal that he was willing to risk his own life for it. Had shot an amazing, kind, hard-working, dedicated hero for the chance to kill him.

Katsuki had no emotions left in him, no rationality, none of the self-compassion he'd been practicing over the past months, nothing. Nothing but a sheer spiteful will to live. Because that man wanted him dead. Because she wanted him dead. So fuck them, he was going to live even if for no other reason than to piss them off. He moved his hands, they felt stiff but he pushed on anyways, moving them to clasp onto each other so he couldn't be tempted by the knife.

Aizawa was the one who came back after what couldn't have been more than a few minutes but felt like years. Slowly he approached Katsuki, movements cautious. It took a moment, but Katsuki

forced himself to meet his teacher's eyes.

At some point, he'd started shaking.

Now his hands were moving again, letting go of each other. One slipped into his pocket to grab the knife. After a moment of thought, his keys too. Both were pulled out gently and held out to his teacher. A silent plea. A warning.

Black eyes widened when his message got across. His teacher's face hardened, pain and determination in his tightly drawn lips, in the furrow of his brow, in the ever growing wrinkles around his eyes. Aizawa took the knife, took the keys, took the temptations away. Where he put them, Katsuki didn't know. Didn't want to know. What he did know was he was being held again, and at some point he cried until his tears ran out.

He wasn't left alone again after that.

Tsunagu pulled through. With Recovery Girl's help, he was only injured for two days total. The main risk had been internal bleeding and subsequent problems with a blood transfusion being rejected. After that he'd been cleared to leave, and he and Katsuki had gone home. Part of Katsuki wanted to refuse to leave his side ever again, part of him wanted to never go near Tsunagu again. Lest it happen again, lest he be the reason his dad died.

Somewhere in there, Aizawa must've told Tsunagu about what happened. About the knife and the keys. That night after they got back from the hospital, Tsunagu had made the choice for Katsuki. He'd hugged him close, and told him again and again it wasn't his fault. It wasn't his fault people would look for any reason to hurt one another. It wasn't his fault someone had been targeting him. It wasn't his fault Tsunagu had been hurt, not the first time and not this time either.

Other people had been telling him that since he'd gotten to the hospital. Over and over again they'd said it, but it wasn't until it was his dad, alive, safe, okay, hugging him close, warm, there, real, that Katsuki finally believed it.

The rational part of his brain returned to him at last. Her voice was still there in his head, but a nicer voice was there to correct her now too.

You can't control other people's actions. You aren't at fault for what someone else chose to do.

That voice whispered. Katsuki found himself able to breath without feeling like there was boulders crushing his chest.

Yes, it was scary that Tsunagu was hurt, but he was okay now. It's not selfish to be loved. To be close to other people. You did the best you could. It would've been much worse if you hadn't acted.

He let himself breath in and out, relaxing slowly. Letting his lost emotions flood back in, taking away that awful empty feeling.

Brave. Quick-thinking. Protected others when you could. Slowed the bleeding. Stopped the bad guy.

There were still tears, but they were better tears. Final tears in place of the endless flood.

Proud that you kept yourself alive. Did good when you gave Aizawa the knife. Knew your limits, knew when to ask for help. Happy you're still here. Proud you made it through.

Katsuki was usually a rational person. He wasn't always though. Sometimes he was weak,

sometimes he panicked. Sometimes everything was just too much. That was okay though, he was human. If he couldn't be rational all the time, it was okay because he could count on spite to pull him through until he was rational again. Spite, and the people around him who would hold him up when he was weak. He'd be okay. Rational, spiteful, hated, loved, whatever he was, he'd make it out alive.

Katsuki Hakamata didn't give up, he didn't let anyone beat him, not even his own mind.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah. I'm happy with most of these, they were little things I really wanted to write out and I'm glad to put them out there. I do have some longer one-shots that will be posted to the series rather than to this work, but other AUs of mine will be getting my focus first.

Again, [Discord link](#) for those that want it,

End Notes

Comments/feedback are always appreciated! It often takes me awhile to reply 'cause I get flustered easily, and sometimes I get too many and can't reply at all, but I always read all of them and usually come back to them when I'm lacking inspiration or having a bad day.

I have a [Pillowfort](#) and [a tumblr](#) you're welcome to hit me up to talk on either one!

Works inspired by this [The Cave](#) by [TheRedDragon173](#)

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!